

**Building Support for the Keeler Women's Center**  
**A Ministry of the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica, Inc.**  
**2220 Central Ave Kansas City, KS 66102 (913-906-8990)**  
**[www.mountsb.org/kwc/](http://www.mountsb.org/kwc/)**

### **Mission**

The Keeler Women's Center is focused on empowering women in the urban core through education, advocacy, personal and spiritual development. Our most important activity is hospitality, which gives warm, compassionate and non-judgmental welcome to each woman.

### **History and population served**

The Keeler Women's Center is a ministry of the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica, Inc., who have served women in this area since 1863. The Keeler Women's Center opened in the fall of 2003 as the result of long range planning by the Sisters that focused on the question, "Where do we want to put our resources, both personnel and financial, in the future?" The desire to assist women, especially poor women, led the Sisters to establish the Center.

We have no boundaries or restrictions so we welcome a very diverse population. We serve women from throughout the metropolitan area and beyond, but many of the 300/+ women we serve each month are single parents living in poverty. Each month we serve about 25 men and give childcare to approximately 20 children, many of their mothers are women living in homeless or domestic violence shelters who come for parenting classes or counseling.

### **Structure**

Three Benedictine Sisters staff the Center. They collaborate with two interns from the KU School of Social Welfare and 60/+ volunteers each month. We partner with other agencies and organizations to provide programs and services that are sorely needed by women to enhance the quality of their lives, but which are often not accessible to those in the urban core. Women are referred to us by many area non-profit organizations located in Kansas and Missouri as well as former participants, area churches, government agencies, case managers, etc. All of our programs and services are offered at no charge except for counseling which is based on a sliding scale. (In recent months, 70% of the women paid \$1 for professional counseling.)

Our funding comes primarily from the Benedictine Sisters who provide the three staff members. Small grants and donations to the Center assist with programming and operational costs. Catholic Charities provides the space at no charge.

Members of the Sisters' monastic council form the Board of Directors which approves the mission and oversees the budget. An advisory group includes women who have used the Center's services and meets monthly to carry out the organization's strategic plan, program development and evaluation, as well as "friend" raising and marketing.

### **The Challenge**

Our mission speaks to a holistic approach to the needs of those of living in poverty, especially generational poverty, because we know that women living in poverty lack not only money for utilities, rent, medical bills and food.\*

- ◆ They also lack emotional resources – emotional energy. Many women we see are depressed, severely stressed, suffer from addictions or have been abused.
- ◆ A large number of women lack basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, and speaking; others lack a GED or high school diploma.
- ◆ Because of poor nutrition and lack of preventative health care, many women in the urban core lack good physical health.

- ◆ Poor women are isolated by their unsafe neighborhoods, or abusive boyfriends or husbands, or lack of transportation; they are often in co-dependent relationships and lack positive support systems and appropriate role models.
- ◆ The women we serve are smart and know many things about survival, such as where the best food kitchen is, how to survive without a telephone, or how to post bond. But often they don't know how to present themselves in formal situations. They may need a job but not know how to write a resume, dress appropriately, or answer questions in an interview.
- ◆ The women may be very religious but often don't see themselves as loved by God – or worthy of being loved by God;
- ◆ They lack beauty in their lives. And often they lack peaceful quiet.

\*based on *Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne

## Impact

The Keeler Women's Center strives to meet many needs of women living in poverty:

- ◆ Hospitality and Peace: We offer hospitality and welcome, beautiful space, quiet music, fresh flowers and fruit. Many women come just to sit in the peaceful quiet. They tell us that they leave with renewed energy and ability to interact more peacefully with their children and others.
- ◆ Counseling: We offer counseling at a very nominal fee. Evaluations indicate that women feel they are making significant progress in dealing with depression, stress and addictions.
- ◆ Tutoring: We provide tutoring for women who apply for admission to Donnelly College or job training programs. We are in the process of initiating a basic literacy program.
- ◆ English: We offer very basic conversational English for immigrant women who desire to provide a better future for their children. Women learn enough English to help their children and to deal with an emergency situation.
- ◆ Health: We offer "Ask a Nurse" where women receive basic health information and referrals to a safety net clinic. Women are pre-approved as patients at Duchesne Clinic, which keeps them from using the emergency room when they simply need to see a nurse or a doctor.
- ◆ Education and Support: We offer education and support groups for women dealing with abuse, sexual assault, addictions, and those who want to learn better ways of parenting, how to keep their house clean or prepare nutritious meals on a small budget, etc. Many women come for financial literacy classes and are helped to do budgeting on a very small income, address credit card debt and open savings accounts.
- ◆ Employment: We offer assistance with the *soft skills* of preparing to look for a job – setting goals, addressing obstacles such as lack of child care or transportation, writing a resume, preparing for an interview, doing a job search, etc. We also offer workshops on dressing for success and make-up tips for the workplace. We give them haircuts/styles and take them shopping for clothes appropriate for the workplace or interview. Women report feeling more confident when they apply for a job. They learn the important habits needed to keep a job and some come back to consult with us if they experience problems and are tempted to quit. We help them find ways to address the issue without walking away from the job.
- ◆ Spiritual: We pray for the women every day and when they wonder where God is in all of this, we offer spiritual direction. Our Holy Women series helps a very diverse group of women (and men) reflect on "What is holiness?" and how very different women seek God.
- ◆ Community Resources: We assist 50 - 55 women (and men) each month by offering referrals and advocacy to help them find assistance they need financially to pay bills or to find resources to help in any area of their lives.

## Opportunities to participate in the ministry of Keeler Women's Center:

Contact the Center if you would like to assist in any of the following ways:

- ◆ As a volunteer or potential partner
- ◆ With publicizing the work of the Center
- ◆ With a financial contribution