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Right Here, Right Now: Woman to Woman in 2023

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MOBILE VERSION

A Letter From The Editors

Earlier this year, Woman to Woman brought you the first installment of our 20th-anniversary newsletter series. Throughout 2023, we're celebrating the **past, present**, and **future** of our program.

Our focus in this issue is *today*: everything that our incredible staff, volunteers, and community members are doing right now. Staying present and embodying the moment is difficult, and the realities of cancer can make it that much harder. But we're making the effort – together – to step back and look in gratitude at our community right here, right now.

In this issue, we spotlight the lessons from our spring reunion, where Sabrina Shih spoke about body acceptance. Through her curriculum, you can ease the pressure of "body positivity" and still feel comfortable in the body you have.

Survivor volunteer Jacquitta Ladson shared her journey to peer mentorship. After reading her interview, you'll come away with a new understanding of the phrase "Your presence is a present."

We also spotlight Woman to Woman's robust programming offering, our pride and joy. From support groups to ongoing educational series, you have plenty of resources at your fingertips. And though our "future" issue arrives later this year, we couldn't help but hint at our upcoming programming schedule.

Whether you've been involved in Woman to Woman since the beginning, or you're about to log on to your first support group, we're so grateful to have you here.
Happy reading.

- Jilian Levinson and Rachel Justus,
Woman to Woman Program Managers

Celebrating summer at our June 2023 volunteer luncheon

Why I Give Back

A conversation with Jacquitta Ladson

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is always a shock. When Jacquitta Ladson learned she had cancer, the unexpected news came with another feeling: a profound sense of isolation. "When I was first diagnosed with ovarian and uterine cancer, cancer didn't run in my family," Jacquitta said. "I just couldn't figure out how this was happening."

Initially, Jacquitta was in no hurry to break through her sense of loneliness. "I was in no mood to speak to anybody. I had an attitude about the whole situation," she explained. "I was in my head, but they didn't give up on me." That's when Myrtice Wooten entered the picture.

Myrtice, who became Jacquitta's mentor, made herself available from the moment the two women met. Myrtice's honesty and empathy won Jacquitta's trust, and eventually, her heart. "She was a breath of fresh air," Jacquitta said, remembering her initial impression of Myrtice. Most crucially, Myrtice showed up no matter what Jacquitta needed, even if it was just someone to sit and be present with her. Today, she considers Myrtice a big sister – and as a mentor, Jacquitta is working to be the same soothing, encouraging presence for new patients.

Though she was reluctant to engage with Woman to Woman, now, Jacquitta is a mentor herself. "It's the understanding that that person will be there, through thick and thin," Jacquitta said, speaking about the aspect of Woman to Woman new patients find most valuable. "No one can tell them what to do or what to expect besides someone who has been there."

To make new patients feel comfortable, Jacquitta keeps it simple: she gives them her presence. "I sit with them, and I'll let them know about my experience," Jacquitta said. And she repeats the sentence that, much to her surprise, became a lifeline after her diagnosis. "I give my card, and I say, 'Call me at anytime, because I do understand,'" Jacquitta said.

Jacquitta and Myrtice share their story in their own words

Jacquitta still refers to Myrtice as her "big sister," and relies on her friendship to this day.

Don't Miss It: Our Events Calendar

Our monthly events calendar is now online, making it easier than ever to attend a virtual class, join a support group or book club, and get involved with our Woman to Woman community. Join us today in a community journey of learning, healing, celebration, and connection.

Bookmark our calendar and stay up-to-date on Woman to Woman events.

We're Proud to Report

In 2022, we set new records in the areas of patient resources, online programming and community participation. The number of virtual support groups Woman to Woman offers went up by fifteen percent last year. Our community membership grew, too, and our Woman to Woman family is now 906 members strong. Thanks to our generous donors, 231 women in need received $64,000 in financial aid grants in 202. That's a 102 percent increase over 2021.

We hope you take full advantage of the resources available to you through Woman to Woman. And if you've never logged on to a support group, or signed up for our book club – now's a great time! Here's a brief overview of all the ways Woman to Woman is supporting patients, survivors, and caregivers:

YOUNG PATIENTS

NEWLY DIAGNOSED

LATINA PATIENTS

BOOK CLUB

PATIENT & CAREGIVER MASSAGES

COVID & CANCER

PEER MENTORSHIP

FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES

Woman to Woman's patient assistance fund is completely philanthropically funded. If you would like to support these services and programs for future patients, please click here.

In Case You Missed It: 20 Years of Community

A Woman to Woman panel discussion

In recognition of Woman to Woman's 20th anniversary, we hosted a panel discussion reflecting on two decades of growth. In this video, program managers Jilian Levinson and Rachel Justus speak with volunteer mentor Tricia Clarke. Tune in to hear about which major milestones we've hit in the last year, and get a sneak peek of all the exciting new developments we have in store for the years to come.

Watch on Youtube

Watch on Facebook

Perfectly Imperfect

Our spring reunion with Sabrina Shih

This spring, our reunion focused on the relationship between survivorship, self-acceptance, and cultivating a healthy body image. Sabrina Shih, social worker at Mount Sinai Center of Excellence in Eating and Weight Disorders, lead the discussion and interactive activities – including some "homework" that you can do today.

"We have such a hard time seeing our true selves," Sabrina explained at the beginning of the reunion. Even though the concept of "body positivity" has become a major part of our culture, it can be difficult to achieve, especially as you consider the body changes that come along with cancer. "The pressure to always have to feel good is an added layer of stress," Sabrina said. But she had some reassuring words that might help you release some tension. "It's okay if we don't feel good all the time," Sabrina said. "It's okay if your body has changed."

Rather than seeing body image as "good" or "bad," Sabrina encouraged attendees to think of it as a spectrum. "We have to recognize that it isn't always possible to completely love your body, and that's okay. You don't have to feel positive about your body all day every day," she explained. Along with those strictly positive and negative feelings, there can be other concepts, such as body respect, body neutrality, and body peace. "Love doesn't need to be the goal," Sabrina said. "Being happy about your body doesn't need to be the goal."

As part of an interactive activity, Sabrina shared a **video** from Dove that demonstrates the difference between how we see ourselves and how others see us. She sent attendees home with an assignment – and it's not too late for you to try it yourself. “Think about how a friend would describe you to a blind artist," Sabrina said. List the words that someone else would use to describe your appearance – someone who loves you, who sees you with more compassion, appreciation, and gratitude than you may see yourself. When you filter through the lens of someone else describing you, Sabrina said, you're much more likely to be positive, gentle, and true to the way you're perceived by others.

To see the full video of our 22nd reunion, check out the Woman to Woman video library on YouTube.

Vision Quest

Manifesting your best life with Sheetal Story

Throughout 2023, the Woman to Woman event calendar has featured special, multi-session classes, workshops, and activities. In May, we concluded our vision board series with Sheetal Story.

You may think you've never tried manifestation before, but according to Sheetal, you've probably manifested plenty of positive things without knowing it. "Manifestation means putting your thoughts into action, and creating them into the world," Sheetal said in an orientation video for our May workshops. "You're bringing energy from your thoughts into the physical, practical, tangible world."

Think about what means the most to you in your life: your close relationships with your family, the home where you feel safe and comfortable, a career that makes you feel fulfilled. "Everything you have in your life right now that you've worked towards, you've manifested," Sheetal said. "The things in your life that you're grateful for were all once wishes that you had."

In her series of workshops, Sheetal teaches participants to manifest a life that aligns with their needs and values. Vision boards play a big role in this, she said, because they serve as a reminder of your values, strengths, and needs. "We can get pulled out of our alignment with things like health diagnoses, with things happening in the world, with our families," she said. "The vision board brings your focus back to your happiness. And if you can envision it, you can create it."

For future programming series, our events calendar is the place to be. Make sure to **bookmark the calendar here** – you don't want to miss workshops on tapping techniques (July) or effective pain management (September).

Questions about our programming or resources? Please email womantowoman@mountsinai.org

if you would like more information.

We Asked, We Listened

A W2W roundtable

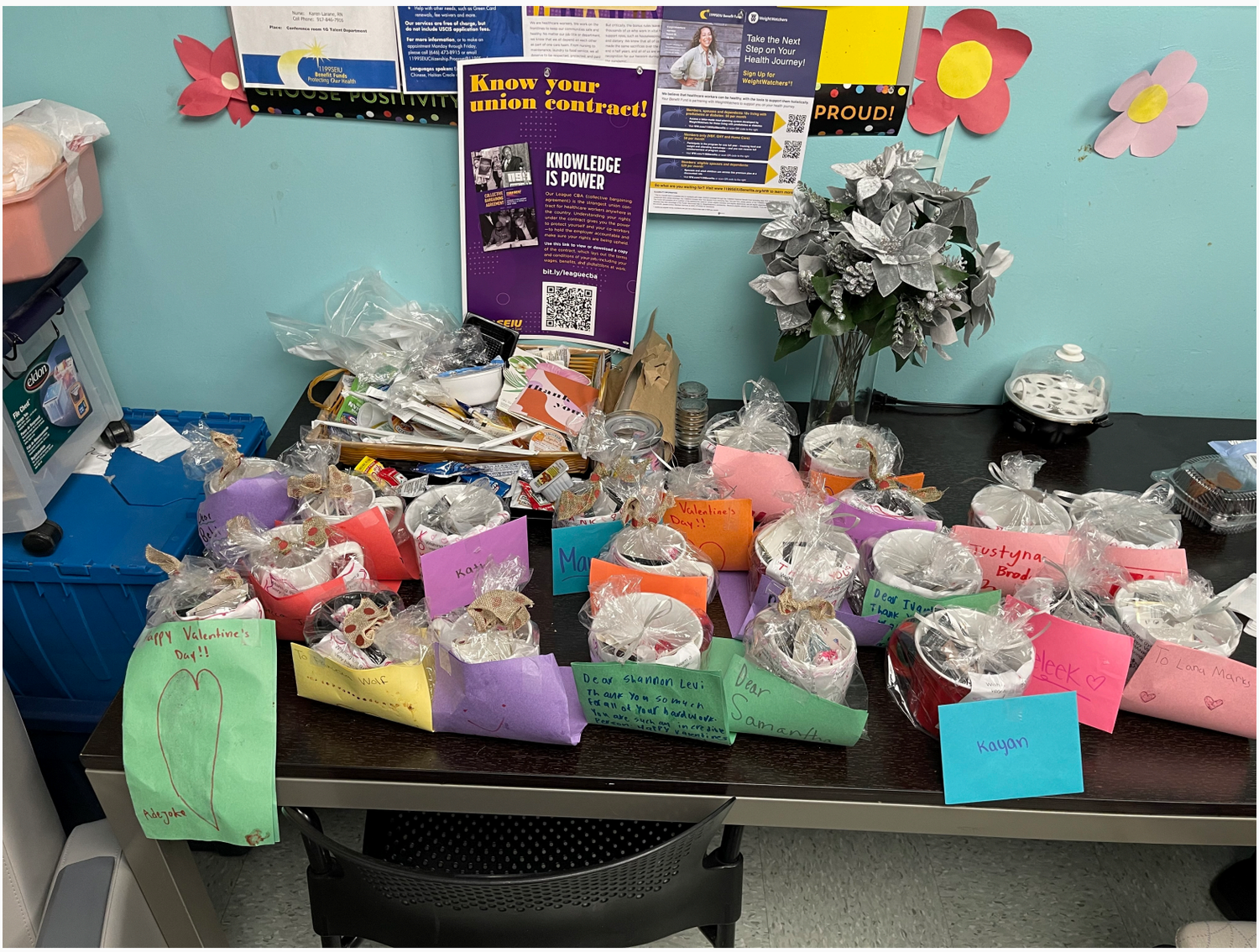
To showcase the range of perspectives in Woman to Woman, we asked three wonderful community members the same question. They were kind enough to share their wisdom with us, and we're excited to pass it along to you.

How has Woman to Woman impacted your life this year?

"I've found myself and my passion. The daily team problem-solving with other staff, or creating events and programs to serve our patient base, have helped me understand how my presence can benefit this community right now." – Emily Szafara, gynecologic oncology social worker

"Even though I'm out of the heavy-duty part of treatment, it's vital to me to keep these women in my life. They're my community. Just seeing their faces and hearing their stories has helped me know I'm not alone." – Benilde Little, author and Woman to Woman community member

"I'm so inspired by the impact of this community on each of its members. Everyone knows they have someone behind them. No matter who you are, someone is there to give you support, love, and understanding." - Emma, co-founder, Club Care (a youth volunteer group and W2W partner)



Teen volunteers from Club Care delivered care packages to Mount Sinai's oncology staff

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