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Celebrating 20 Years of Woman to Woman

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A Roundtable With Our Founders

A Letter From The Editor

Welcome to the first installment of our 20th-anniversary newsletter series: the past, present, and future of Woman to Woman.

As this first of three newsletters reviews the history of when Woman to Woman was founded in 2003, we hope this celebratory nostalgia resonates with you wherever you are in your cancer journey. It is also with immense sadness that as we look back at Woman to Woman throughout the years, that we share our beloved founder, Valerie Goldfein, is no longer with us. Please read on to see a tribute to her and her life's work after she

The present and future of Woman to Woman have been determined by the love, care, and effort that has been put into the early building blocks of this program. Survivor volunteers, physicians, social workers, family members, and other members of the Mount Sinai community have all contributed throughout the years to ensuring Woman to Woman supports patients from a physical, psychological, and spiritual perspective.

Thank you for being a part of our beloved community as we begin this new year. Stay tuned for our next edition celebrating the present milestones of this program.

was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and felt called to support those impacted by gynecologic cancer. The number of lives she changed by founding this program is immeasurable.

-Nicole Theodore, Woman to Woman volunteer,cervical cancer survivor and Woman to Woman Newsletter editor

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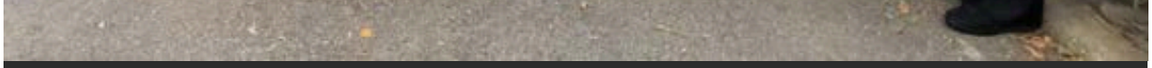
Woman to Woman began with five volunteers



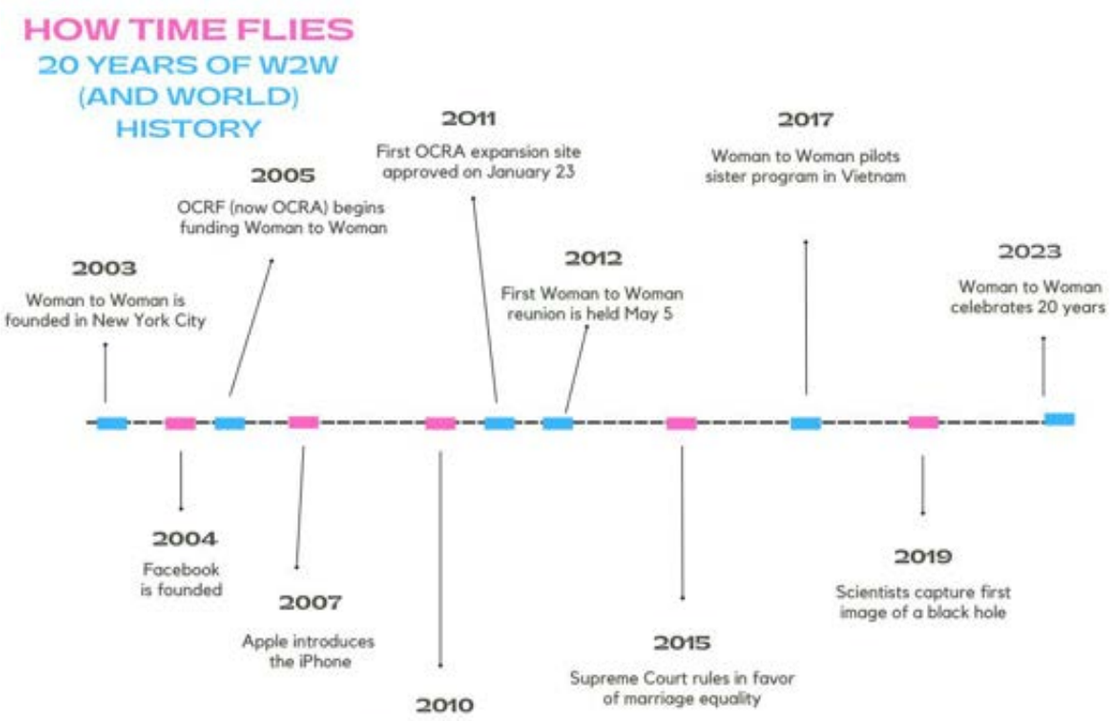
We're so proud of how our volunteer base has grown (Fall 2021)

We are thankful for our dedicated Woman to Woman volunteers

The Wayback Machine

A timeline of W2W and world events

Over the last 20 years, our world has seen a lot of change – and as many of our long-time volunteers and staff can attest, we've changed too. This year, we're celebrating a milestone. Two decades of financial aid, technological advancement, peer-to-peer support, and empowerment. Two decades of patients, caregivers, volunteers, and staff coming together. Two decades of helping hands, for every woman, every step of the journey.



Downton Abbey and MasterChef debut

Remembering Valerie Goldfein

1942 – 2022

In many ways, 2022 was a year of victories. But we are also heartbroken after facing a tremendous loss in November: our founder, Valerie Goldfein.

Valerie, an ovarian cancer survivor, founded Woman to Woman four years after her diagnosis in November of 1999. Though she was bolstered by her husband, family, and friends, **Valerie told OCRA** that her diagnosis was isolating. "I had never actually known anyone who had survived ovarian cancer," she recalled. "That is why Woman to Woman was conceived. I wanted to make people aware that there ARE survivors and there IS hope."

After securing seed funding from the Mount Sinai Auxiliary Board, Valerie gathered volunteers, and they launched Woman to Woman in December 2003. In 2011, OCRF began expanding the program nationwide. In 2006, Valerie was named a United Hospital Fund Hospital Auxilian. In 2016, she was named a New Yorker of the Year by the New York Times.

Her dedication to the ovarian and gynecologic cancer communities is also dearly remembered by her friends. "Valerie had the foresight, understanding, and compassion to make all of this happen," said Joyce Manheimer, one of the original Woman to Woman volunteers. The peer support model Valerie longed for during her own treatment and recovery is now used in hospitals around the globe. Joyce's husband, Alan Manheimer, added, "There's a camaraderie, a sisterhood," that exists thanks to Valerie.

As the entire Mount Sinai community mourns Valerie's passing, her legacy will continue to positively impact countless women. "I don't think Valerie ever expected it to grow like this, in her wildest dreams," Joyce said. "None of us did."

"Whatever was needed, we tried to do." – Valerie Goldfein, speaking to the New York Times for a 2016 New Yorker of the Year profile

I'VE BEEN WHERE YOU ARE

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER, VALERIE GOLDFEIN

"You are not alone..." This statement which appears on the cover of our brochure defines the hearfelt promise of *Woman to Woman*.

Six years ago, when I was diagnosed with gynecologic cancer, though I had the support of family and friends, I longed for someone to tell me "I've been where you are," or "Do you have any questions?" I started *Woman to Woman* so that other patients would have the kind of companionship in their illness that wasn't available to me.

Toward the development of *Woman to Woman*, Dr. Peter Dottino gave unstintingly of his time and energy, and the Mount Sinai Auxiliary Board generously granted seed money. The heart and soul of the program, however, are the nine volunteer survivors and Arden Moulton, the *Woman to Woman* Program Coordinator. They have made my dream a reality.

Gynecologic cancers are more mysterious and personal than many other illnesses. I hope that we are able to help debunk the myths, shed some light on the darkness, and provide support to patients here at Mount Sinai. ■

Valerie's inspiring message from a 2006 Woman to Woman newsletter

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

Reunions Then and Now

Highlights from 20 years of Woman to Woman reunions

Twice a year, the entire Woman to Woman community mobilizes for a signature event. The biannual reunions are more than just a social gathering – they're an opportunity for empowerment and education. That's by design, said Robin Findling, who initiated the Woman to Woman reunion conferences alongside Arden Moulton in 2012.

"Some of the topics have left me so amazed," Robin said, thinking back on over a decade of outstanding events. Dynamic speakers bring these topics to life in unexpected ways. Dr. Martha Eddy spoke on the benefits of "Moving for Life" in a reunion that also featured a live performance from the band NED. At a different reunion, bestselling author Michael Port shared the stage with Dr. Bob Baker, a physician and ventriloquist who has appeared on America's Got Talent.

The reunions are made possible in an enormous show of generosity by individuals and other organizations. Experts, nonprofits, and brands have all contributed, by donating supplies for gift bags, appearing onstage, or working behind the scenes. "People volunteer their time," Robin said. "It's an act of love, that everybody gives."

Above all else, Robin said the most remarkable impact of the reunions is the sense of community they foster. "I never could've imagined the connections that patients would make with each other and with providers," she said. "The trust there is in that room."

Robin can attest to the difference planning and executing reunions has made in her own life. "Our bond is extraordinary as volunteers," she said. "These women have become my most important friendships." But Robin corrected herself – "friends" wasn't the right term for her fellow volunteers. "They're my family," she said.

On Thursday, March 16, we will hold our 22nd reunion. Join us for Perfectly Imperfect: Cultivating Healthy Body Image through Survivorship. You'll learn skills to cultivate stronger and healthier body image through deep reflection, body-neutral skills building, and a process of finding strength through body acceptance. Please invite a woman in your life who could benefit from this workshop!
RSVP By March 10 to womantowoman@mountsinai.org

Special Occasions

To recognize a full decade of Woman to Woman reunions, we selected some of the best "throwback" photos from past reunions, events, and gatherings.

December Luncheons in 2022 (above) and 2009 (below)

Fall snapshots from 2018 (above) and 2007 (below)

Don't Miss It: Our Events Calendar

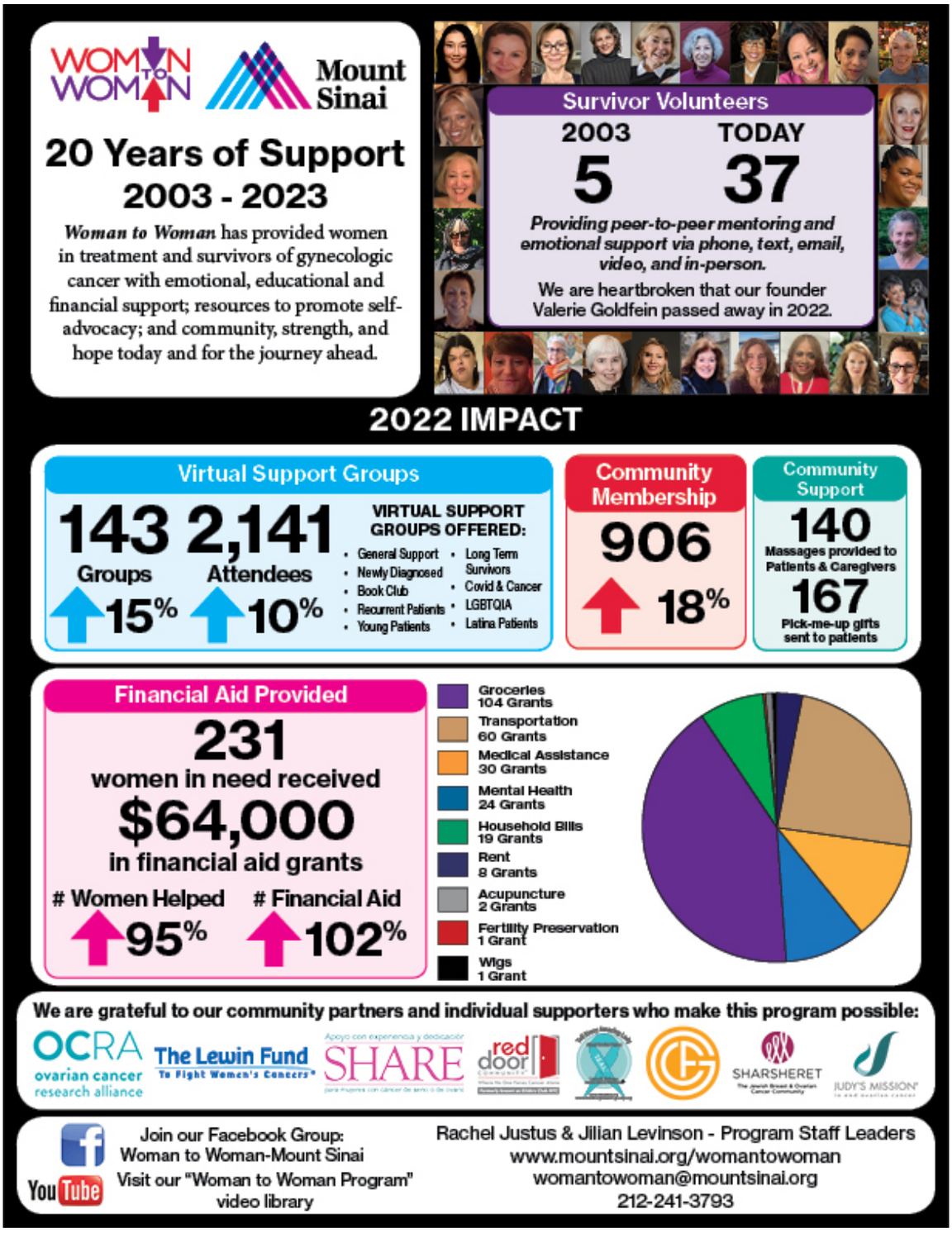
Our monthly events calendar is now online, making it easier than ever to attend a virtual class, join a support group or book club, and get involved with our Woman to Woman community. Be part of a 20-year tradition of learning, healing, celebration, and connection.

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

We're Proud to Report...

Twenty years of giving back

Questions about our programming or resources? Please email womantowoman@mountsinai.org if you would like more information.



A More Perfect (Re)union

Patients, practitioners, and volunteers have shaped our program by sharing their stories. Here are just a few highlights from brochures and newsletters past.

About *Woman to Woman*

Woman to Woman is a network of trained volunteer survivors of gynecologic cancer who provide hope, one-on-one support, education and advocacy for women in treatment at Mount Sinai, their partners, families and caregivers. The Program was founded in 2003 as a collaboration between the Department of Social Work Services and the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Science at The Mount Sinai Medical Center.

From their first meeting with a woman to the end of treatment, *Woman to Woman* volunteers have helped hundreds of patients adjust to their new lives as cancer survivors. Our mission is fulfilled every day by the generous outreach of our 15 survivor volunteers who meet one-on-one with their peers—to listen, discuss concerns, provide support and sometimes, just hold a hand. Volunteers are matched to new patients based on cancer type, age and other demographics and see women while they are hospitalized, at the Gynecologic Clinic, and at treatment centers. They give hope for a good outcome, and a special understanding that cannot be provided by someone with no personal experience with gynecologic cancer.

An early Woman to Woman brochure from 2007 describing our mission

survivors & VOLUNTEERS

WOMAN TO WOMAN UPDATE

FROM ARDEN MOULTON,
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

On behalf of the survivor volunteers, I want to thank all of you who have generously welcomed us into your lives. Our mission is to provide support and information to women in treatment for gynecologic cancer and their families. We hope our remarkable volunteers have helped make your difficult journey easier to manage.

In addition to our one-to-one mentoring, *Woman to Woman* has added programs to address our mission to educate and inform. On November 15th, we partnered with Cancer Care to host a one-day conference for couples impacted by gynecologic cancer (of course, there was information for single women, too). This unique conference allowed partners to address issues common to both patient and caregiver. In the morning session, women interacted with an expert on self-esteem and body image, while their partners met with Floyd Allen, a Cancer Care social worker who specializes in sexuality and intimacy. Afterwards, couples came together to learn about nutrition and get some cooking tips from Esther Trepole, Director of Nutrition at God's Love We Deliver. The afternoon session included information on workplace issues and caregiving. We hope this conference was an enjoyable as well as informative experience for individuals and couples.

ARDEN MOULTON

Allow me to update you on our very busy year. After undergoing training in June, Marilyn Aronson, Andrea Licari, Marie Sanford, and Myrtice Wooten were welcomed into the program. There are now 15 *Woman to Woman* volunteers, representing a wide demographic, cultural, and medical cross-section of women, all ready and able to provide one-to-one support to our diverse patient population. *Woman to Woman* volunteers, who range in age from 30–65, are all survivors of gynecologic cancer. Eight volunteers are currently employed: a real estate agent, an accountant, the head of marketing for a large fashion conglomerate, a pediatrician, and two mental health professionals. Two volunteers are Spanish-speaking, and one of them speaks French as well. The other seven are retired, with very busy volunteer and family lives.

Woman to Woman is producing an interactive Web-based education system for women in treatment for gynecologic cancer and their families. Our first program will address the needs of women with ovarian cancer, followed by programs on uterine and cervical cancers. There's a great need for reliable, accessible information on gynecologic cancer, its treatment, and the emotional and practical issues associated with diagnosis. This user-friendly system will be a groundbreaking new way to provide accurate, helpful information to families. Our consultants on the site are experts in health literacy, Internet technology, and research. We hope to have it on the Web within the next six months.

Please contact us with any personal questions and concerns, or other programming ideas that you may have. We are here for you. ■

Arden Moulton's personal message in the Woman to Woman newsletter, 2008

a volunteer's EXPERIENCE

BY NANCY IRIZARRY

I was diagnosed in May of 2006 with Ovarian Cancer, a very big surprise to me, because no one in my family ever had any kind of cancer. So we were all taken aback.

It started out with a pain on my left side. In May 2005, I told my GYN doctor that I had stopped getting my period. I was 42 years old. She said I could be pre-menopausal. She ran a series of blood tests such as CA125, thyroid, and hormonal tests for menopause. They came back negative. So she said, "Don't worry, I will continue to monitor you every six months."

In three months I called her again to say I still had not gotten my period. She told me to come in again, she did the CA125 again, and it was still negative. Six months later she said that I should wait a couple of months because it could be my nerves, stress at work. So, now I waited until it was already nine months and called again. I went back to her office and she still could not find anything.

A year to the day later, I could not take the pain that I had on my left side, so I went to a health clinic that sent me to the emergency room. That is when they found I had ovarian cancer and a tumor on my aorta. They did not know what to do. I was in the hospital for a week, and all that they were doing for me was giving me painkillers.

The doctors there started asking me for the names of all of my doctors. Then I was referred to Dr. Chuang, a gynecologic oncologist at Mount Sinai Hospital, where I was moved.

I have a rare type of ovarian cancer called granulosa cell tumor. Only 1,500 women are diagnosed each year. Dr. Chuang told me that I had a good prognosis but the tumor might come back and need chemotherapy treatment in the future. He also explained what needed to be done. He was not able to perform surgery until a week later, when he could arrange for a specialist who would be able to help with the tumor on my aorta. Thanks to both doctors' expertise, the surgery was a success.

While I was in the hospital, Valerie and Arden came to visit me and told me about *Woman to Woman*. When I came home, Pamela called me and introduced herself as one of the survivor volunteers. That's when I started to get all my questions answered. Pamela provided me with the comfort I needed to realize that I could overcome this.

Two weeks after I had surgery, I started my chemo treatments. I decided to get my treatments on an outpatient basis closer to home. My treatments were intense. I had to go for a week of chemo from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm every day for a week, and then off for two weeks. I had to do four treatments so this really took a toll on me.

I have to thank my husband, son, sister, and family for all their support. They were my rock to help me get through this. I love them all dearly!

While I was going through my chemo treatment, I was able to speak with Arden and I expressed the need to help others as Valerie, Pamela, and Arden helped me. I thank these three amazing women who helped me through my recovery. Just like so many other people, the first thing I did after my surgery was go on the Internet. This provided me with a lot of very disturbing information. So having them guide me was a blessing.

In 2007 I joined *Woman to Woman* as a survivor volunteer. I've met so many wonderful families and patients that have helped me while I helped them. It's an experience that I am happy to be part of and look forward to.

In September 2008, I started to get pains again on my left side, just like I did back in May of 2006. I was examined by my doctor who asked me to get a CT scan and a PET scan. In the PET scan there was something on my urethra. So Dr. Chuang asked me to get a biopsy, to make sure that everything was okay. Well, the biopsy showed that the ovarian cancer had returned.

I had surgery again on October 2, 2008. The good thing was that I didn't have to take chemo. I was given an oral medicine that is given to breast cancer patients. My doctor wanted me to try it to see if it would help keep the cancer away. I took it for six months. As of November 9th, 2009, I am cancer free.

Being a two-time survivor is hard. It's difficult to meet with new patients and tell them that I had cancer twice. The patient is worried about getting over what she has now and she doesn't want to hear that it can come again. So I do not mention it unless someone tells me it's there a second time too. ■

Nancy Irizarry writes about volunteering in our newsletter, 2008

We Asked, We Listened

A W2W roundtable on creativity in our community

In this space, we typically showcase the range of perspectives in Woman to Woman, by asking three wonderful community members the same question.

To recognize Woman to Woman's 20th anniversary, we're doing something a little different in this issue. In 2019 on the Mount Sinai Hospital Facebook page, a live panel highlighted this program's achievements. Our founders Valerie Goldstein, Arden Moulton, and Dr. Peter Dottino spoke about everything our community has achieved over the years. We're very grateful to have these brilliant voices on the record, especially our hero, Valerie. **You can watch the full video here.**

Our founders kindly shared their wisdom with us, and we're excited to pass it along to you.

Valerie Goldfein speaks as Dr. Peter Dottino, Arden Moulton, and volunteer Nicole Theodore look on

"All of us hope that this program becomes obsolete. But while there is a need, it's a privilege to be a part of it."

– Valerie Goldfein

"Nationwide, people looked at the program and asked, 'Why can't we have this?' Woman to Woman filled a big void."

– Peter Dottino

"We advocate, we educate, we support. We knew that it had to be done, and we did it."

– Arden Moulton

Our mailing address is:
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