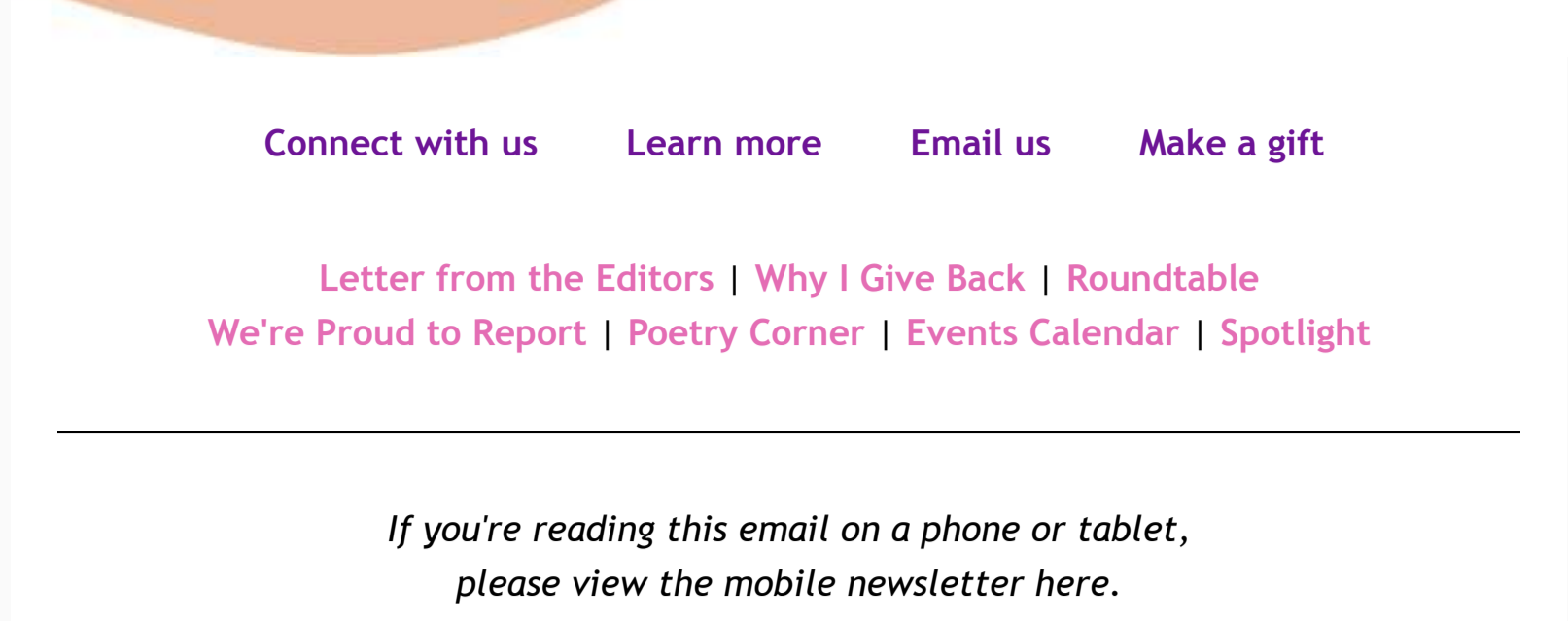


# WOMAN TO WOMAN

June 2024

## THE POWER OF HUGS



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### A Letter From the Editors

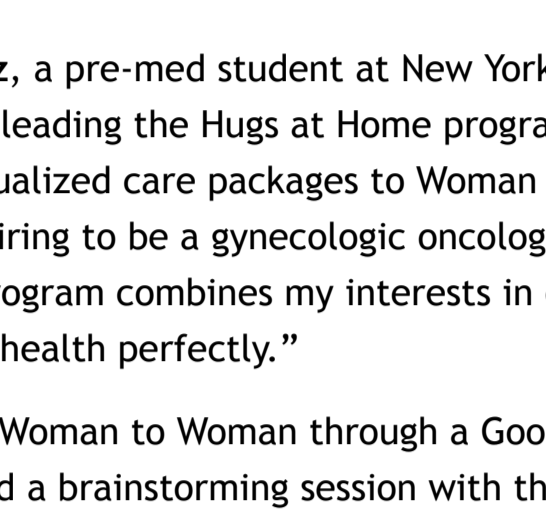
**"No matter how strong a woman is, she has a weak point. And sometimes all she needs is a hug"**  
— Melanie McNichols

In our three 2024 newsletters, we are highlighting the ways Woman to Woman members care for their bodies, minds, and spirits. Our summer newsletter will celebrate the spirit of the Woman to Woman community including the generosity and selflessness of our patients, volunteers and team members. This issue will spotlight community members who have given back by helping to create our brand new Hugs at Home program which mails customized care packages to patients.

The actual act of hugging can make us feel safe and relaxed, however, the feeling of a "hug" could come in many forms, such as the gifts that might be included in the Hugs at Home packages like a handmade blanket, an engaging new book or a beautifully-scented lotion.

So we are sending virtual hugs to all of our wonderful community members and thank you for reading! Whether you've been part of Woman to Woman since its initiation, have recently received a meaningful gift, or you're about to join your first support group, we're delighted to have you here.

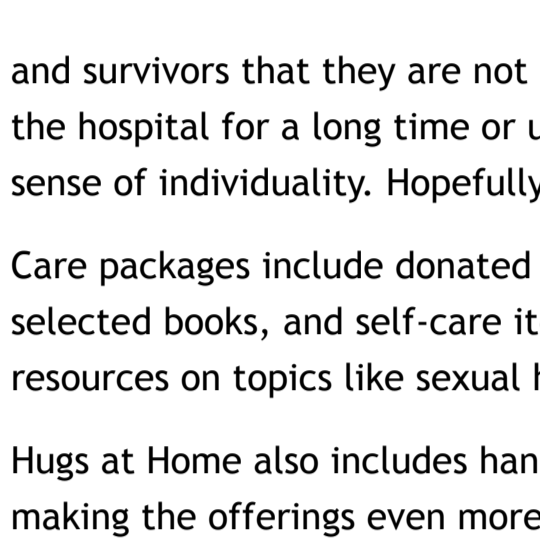
- Jilian and Rachel



Jilian Levinson and Rachel Justus, Woman to Woman Program Managers

### "Why I Give Back"

#### Hugs at Home Program



Nicole Munoz, a pre-med student at New York University, is leading the Hugs at Home program, which sends individualized care packages to Woman to Woman patients. Aspiring to be a gynecologic oncologist, Nicole said, "This program combines my interests in oncology and women's health perfectly."

Nicole found Woman to Woman through a Google search and scheduled a brainstorming session with the program's leadership. She explained, "Our initial idea was simply to do something nice for our patients, and we've built on that."

The program aims to remind Woman to Woman patients and survivors that they are not alone and are part of a caring community. "If you're in the hospital for a long time or undergoing uncomfortable treatments, you can lose your sense of individuality. Hopefully, this is a good pick-me-up," Nicole said.

Care packages include donated items such as knitted blankets, hats, scarves, hand-selected books, and self-care items. Patients can also choose from a variety of printed resources on topics like sexual health, finances, parenting, and sleep.

Hugs at Home also includes handwritten letters in the patient's primary language, making the offerings even more personal. "From the very beginning, this project has been very patient-centered," Nicole added.

Her involvement in the program has not only been meaningful for the patients but has also shaped her career goals: "I want to make a tangible difference in my patients' lives beyond just treating their illnesses. That's an important part of connecting with your patient."



High school volunteers through Club Care supported Hugs at Home by organizing a drive to collect items for the mailed care packages and assembling and mailing 37 gift boxes, each with a personalized note for the recipient.

### Hugs at Home - "A Little Box of Comfort"

**Hugs at Home was created through the artistic, philanthropic, creative, entrepreneurial and networking skills of numerous Woman to Woman community members. We're shining a spotlight on some people who are using their talents for Hugs at Home:**



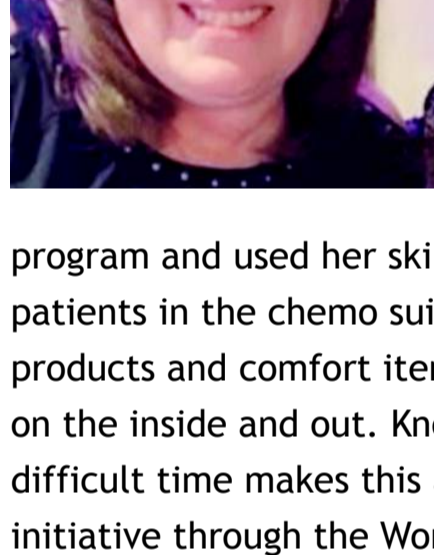
Carol Lee, a Woman to Woman survivor volunteer and graphic designer, was eager to help with the Hugs at Home care package program. She explained, "Many women with cancer feel isolated, even if they have supportive friends and family. There's something magical about knowing that people you don't personally know want to provide support and care through personalized care packages."

Carol decided to use her graphic design skills to create flyers in English and Spanish to promote the new program: "The care packages mean a lot when you're at home alone dealing with the side effects of chemo or illness. I wanted to capture that with my flyers. I tried to illustrate how this program is very tactile and tangible, expressing the touch that recipients feel through Hugs at Home."



Mimi Gordon, has been a gynecologic cancer patient for 10 years and involved with Woman to Woman since her first treatment, shared, "Woman to Woman taught me how to advocate for myself, and in turn advocate for others."

Mimi wanted to give back to the Woman to Woman community, which she feels has been incredibly helpful throughout her cancer journey. Mimi, who had personally received blankets from Woman to Woman during her chemotherapy treatments and hospitalizations knew what a comforting gift knit items could be. She therefore decided to enlist her crafty friend to crochet blankets for the Hugs at Home program.



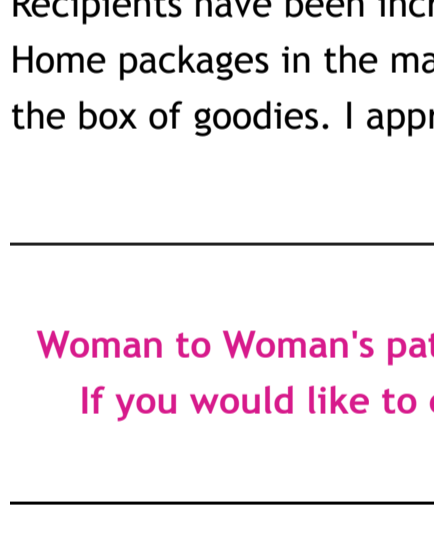
Dianne Lerner, a close friend of Mimi's, visited her during a recent hospitalization and saw that Woman to Woman had given Mimi a crochet blanket. At Mimi's suggestion, Dianne, who has been learning to crochet while sitting with her nearly 101-year-old mom in a nursing home, started crocheting blankets, scarves, and hats for the Hugs at Home program using yarn donations arranged by Mimi.

"When patients have gone through a traumatizing event like cancer surgery, chemo, or hospitalization, the Hugs at Home program sends a little box of comfort to their home. I think it's such a nice, feel-good thing to be part of," Dianne said.



Volunteer Caryn DiMari was introduced to Woman to Woman in 2018 when Robin Findling, a volunteer, walked into her room at Mount Sinai Hospital. "Robin listened to my concerns and fears about my treatment, and gave me confidence and the strength that I needed at that time. I was then introduced to the inspiring Woman to Woman community and connected with other women through educational and motivational zoom meetings, book club and phone calls over the years."

After retiring from her professional career with the DOE, Caryn was inspired to volunteer for the Woman to Woman program and used her skills to secure donations which fill comfort bags distributed to patients in the chemo suites. "I've been reaching out to request donations of beauty products and comfort items to lift spirits and help our community members feel better on the inside and out. Knowing that I can contribute to helping a patient going through a difficult time makes this a rewarding experience." Caryn says "I love that Hugs at Home allows the Woman to Woman community to mail care packages and bring comfort and a smile to cancer patients at home. I think it's important to expand the Woman to Woman outreach in ways that are equitable, and can reach patients. To be able to support people when they're feeling most vulnerable can really make a difference in someone's healing journey."



Eileen Shore, a cancer survivor and volunteer with Woman to Woman, fell in love with the concept of Hugs at Home the moment she learned about the program. Eileen immediately reached out to Nicole Munoz, the college student coordinating the project, to offer her help. She shared, "If I can do anything to help women who are suffering and going through some really bad, frightening, painful things in their lives, I will do it."

She has since become the "fairy godmother" of the program, generously contributing funds to help cover mailing costs and leveraging her personal connections to secure donations of items including 20 pounds of jewelry! She explained, "Even if you're surrounded by family, you're really going through this by yourself and if something like a piece of costume jewelry or a book that we give to you makes you feel good, even for an hour, there's nothing better than that."

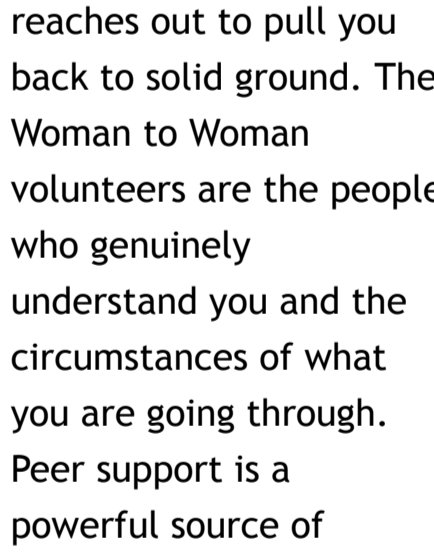
Recipients have been incredibly enthusiastic and appreciative about receiving Hugs at Home packages in the mail. One patient shared: "It was a wonderful surprise to receive the box of goodies. I appreciate your caring and thoughtful generosity."

[Woman to Woman's patient assistance fund is completely philanthropically funded. If you would like to continue our 21-year legacy of support, please click here.](#)

### "Roundtable: We Asked, We Listened"

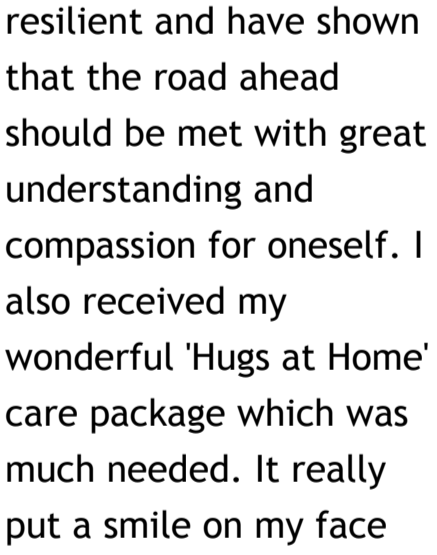
#### How Woman to Woman Nourishes the Spirit

In our roundtable discussion, we showcase a range of perspectives by asking three community members the same question. Today, we've asked a staff member, patient, and survivor volunteer, "What's a Woman to Woman program that has been particularly nourishing to the spirit?"



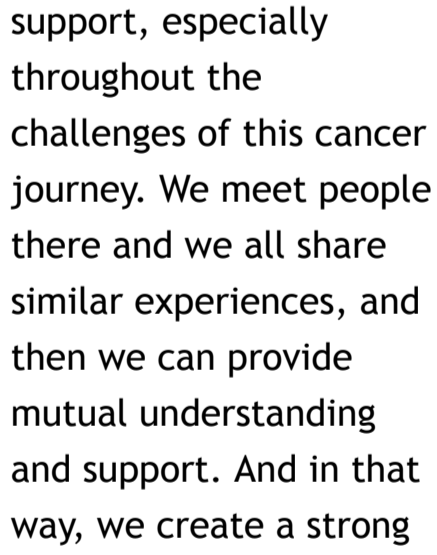
**Emily Szfara**  
Gynecologic Oncology  
Social Worker

"The Woman to Woman program strengthens the spirit in ways that are hard to describe but beautiful to witness. When managing a chronic illness, peer support can serve as an invaluable lifeline that reaches out to pull you back to solid ground. The Woman to Woman volunteers are the people who genuinely understand you and the circumstances of what you are going through. Peer support is a powerful source of comfort and solace that allows you to seek refuge and honor your journey in a non-judgmental and sustaining way."



**Diane Cormier**  
Gynecologic Cancer  
Patient

"Since my diagnosis, I have been fortunate to have met wonderful women who have not only shared their stories about their trials and tribulations but also about their strength and courage. They are resilient and have shown that the road ahead should be met with great understanding and compassion for oneself. I also received my wonderful 'Hugs at Home' care package which was much needed. It really put a smile on my face and heart."



**Sandra Wang**  
Survivor Volunteer

"The Woman to Woman Reunions are like finding your traveling companion. These events bring us together and help us connect and support each other. The Reunions provide an opportunity for us to find companionship and support, especially throughout the challenges of this cancer journey. We meet people there and we all share similar experiences, and then we can provide mutual understanding and support. And in that way, we create a strong sense of camaraderie within our community."

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

### We're Proud to Report...

June is Pride Month and Woman to Woman welcomes patients of all race/ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, cultural and religious backgrounds and all people living with disabilities. We are proud to offer specific support groups to meet the needs of patients from populations including the LGBTQIA+ community, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & People of Color), Latina patients and more.

[Please see our calendar for a complete list of offerings.](#)

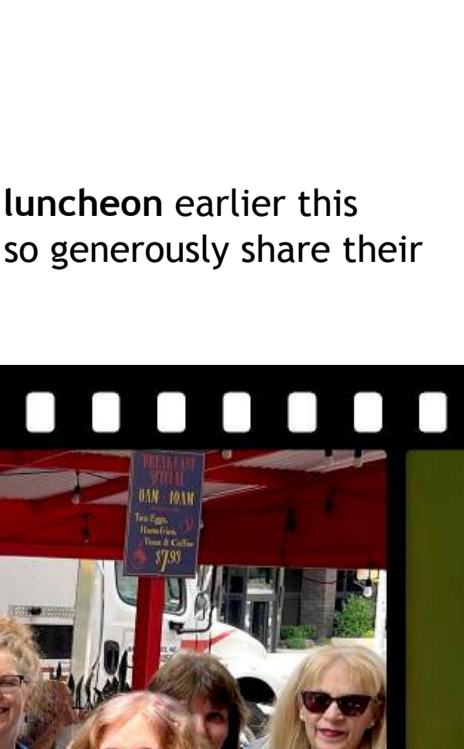


### Poetry Corner

Some wisdom from cancer survivor Audre Lorde, a self-described "Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet"

For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered.

Audre Lorde



### 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 a part of online and in-person opportunities for learning, healing, celebration, and connection.

[Bookmark our calendar and stay up-to-date on Woman to Woman events.](#)

### Spotlight

Woman to Woman survivor volunteers gathered for a summer luncheon earlier this month. We are so grateful to our phenomenal volunteers who so generously share their expertise, experience and time to benefit our community!



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