

CHEERS to Charity



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Bloom Again Supports Financially Vulnerable Women

Two local women diagnosed with breast cancer have more in common than just dealing with the disease.

One of the women is Monique Green, the recipient of a \$900 grant from Bloom Again, a relatively new Pasadena-based nonprofit organization created to provide financial assistance to self-supporting women living near the poverty level who are suddenly faced with a medical emergency.

The other is Lois Frankel, Bloom Again's founder, who came away from battling breast cancer empowered to help others. Her own illness made her sympathetic to women struggling with unexpected medical issues that exacerbate the daily stress of living in an economically vulnerable position.

These two women are bound by the roots of Frankel's caring nature that is the heart of Bloom Again, allowing women like Green to focus on her cancer treatment, rather than being consumed by the anxiety of figuring out how to pay next month's rent.

Green is just one example of the many women Bloom Again aims to serve — women who are one medical emergency away from being on the street. It's easy to imagine the downward spiral that occurs after an illness results in missing work or job loss. Being dealt the unfortunate medical wildcard can be a life-altering experience, compounded by having to make the impossible choice of whether to pay rent, doctor's bills or buy food.

Bloom Again helps deal with those harsh realities by taking care of a laundry list of needs from in-home health care to supplementation of lost wages, transitional living expenses, cab fare, rent, utili-



The Bloom Again Foundation board of directors include Cristina Regalado, Trish Bennett, Pamela Erhardt, Eleanor Beasley, Lois Frankel and Susan Picascia. Not pictured: Sanya Obsivac, Nancy Schoephoester and Kathy Wimmer.

ties, child care and groceries. And while Bloom Again does not fund medical procedures or medical care, what sets them apart from other nonprofit organizations is the rapid response to requests for financial assistance, which are often addressed in 48 hours or less. This type of response can be the key to circumventing the flow of things going from bad to worse.

"Ninety-five percent of every dollar that comes in goes directly to women but we don't just hand them a check," said Frankel. "Instead, we write checks to landlords, the DWP, and in one case, a towing agency after a woman, through no fault of her own, was involved in a car accident, had to go to the hospital and her car was impounded."

According to Frankel, less than 5% of Bloom Again donations go toward operational expenses and the foundation's administrative costs

are underwritten by the board of directors and by Frankel's company, Corporate Coaching International.

As a keynote speaker and author with international acclaim, Frankel has spent many years giving talks and sharing her wisdom on workplace success. After recovering from cancer, Frankel found herself nearing retirement but still wanting to do more.

"I talked to my personal board of directors who are friends and colleagues, and ran the idea [for Bloom Again] by them," said Frankel. "Every person I talked to said 'yes.'"

To build her board, Frankel chose people with the skills she needed, with board member backgrounds varying from investment banking to psychotherapy. Next came the work of establishing nonprofit status, defining a mission, identifying community partners and

constituents and finally, fundraising.

The initial solicitation took place before the 2008 holiday season, recalls Frankel. The board sent letters, and at the end of the day they were shocked to get \$10,000 and quickly moved to "now we need to start giving money away."

Additional funds have been raised through a holiday card program indicating that a donation has been made to Bloom Again Foundation in honor of a special person, family member or client.

Bloom Again's first annual fundraiser, Lunafest, took place last spring at the Warner Bros. Studios and allowed guests to view short films by and about women. The film festival fundraiser exceeded their goal, and since then Frankel and the board have worked to identify a new set of objectives — to strengthen the foundation's partnerships,

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planned giving and corporate sponsorships.

In an era when poverty has increasingly become a women's issue, with female-headed families more likely to be poor, Frankel encourages agencies to contact Bloom Again so they can work together to assist a greater number of clients. Through increased nonprofit partnerships, Bloom Again can grow outreach and support for local women whose illnesses, medical emergencies, and other health-related challenges are taxing their finances.

With Bloom Again's mission comes a challenging reminder that you can make more than just a living, you can make a difference by considering the plight of nearly 27 million American women and their families who live below the poverty line. Many women in this precarious position are among the working poor — employed but cooking up a recipe for disaster with low wages and high dependent expenses.

Bloom Again is working to cultivate change by offering hope. But there's still plenty of room to lend a hand in the garden. "We'd love to give away more money and we'd love to grow," said Frankel. For more information, visit www.bloomagain.org.

Frankel Aspires to Help Less-Fortunate Women Blossom

Bloom Again Foundation was founded by Dr. Lois Frankel in 2008 in conjunction with a group of like-minded friends and colleagues who form the Board of Directors.

The concept was born while Frankel was being treated for breast cancer and realized just how fortunate she was to have the time and money to heal at her own pace.

"I thought about all of the women who live paycheck-to-paycheck and knew they didn't have the same luxury," she said.

After completing chemotherapy when a friend said it looked like she was "blooming again," Frankel put the wheels in motion to establish a foundation in Pasadena to help

financially vulnerable working women living at or below the federally defined poverty levels.

Recipients of gifts from Bloom Again Foundation are referred by community agencies familiar with the women and their circumstances. Bloom Again does not give money directly to women, but rather works with the referring agency to identify a specific need — such as rent, utilities, or a car payment — and sends checks directly to those sources. Bloom Again has partnered with:

- The Center for Non-Violent Education and Parenting (www.CNVEP.org)
- The Walter Hoving Home

(www.walterhovinghome.com)

- The Dolores Mission (www.dolores-mission.org)

- Huntington Hospital Cancer Center (www.huntingtonhospital.com)

- Cedars Sinai Medical Center (www.cedars-sinai.edu/)

- The Foothill Unity Center (www.foothillunitycenter.org)

In the past six months donations have enabled Bloom Again to provide 13 monetary gifts to referrals from Dolores Mission, Huntington Hospital Cancer Center, Justice for All and Cedars Sinai, in amounts of \$100 to \$1,700 each. The gifts have been used to assist during a short

absence from work, which can be life changing, to pay a hospital patient's rent or parishioners' utilities or rent.

One woman fell while at work on a lunch truck and was subsequently fired. She is a mother of five whose husband left to look for work in San Francisco and never returned. She was about to be relocated to a homeless shelter until Bloom Again intervened to help with her finances.

The financial assistance offered by Bloom Again contributes to the emotional and physical recovery that is crucial in helping women get past the unforeseen medical challenges and eventually heal.



Lois Frankel



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