



Women's History Month 2021

Special Edition Newsletter

Designed by Brianna McMullen, Community Health Educator

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The Journey to National Women's History Month

Since 1995, presidents have consistently issued annual proclamations designating the month of March as "Women's History Month." It is the time of the year where the immense impact women have made on society is commemorated. From women's rights leaders, to the amazing women in our lives living out their dreams, and even our history-making vice president, Women's History Month gives us all a chance to listen to "her" story and celebrate women who continually break glass ceilings.

Before National Women's History Month,

International Women's Day was declared March 8th and celebrated. It all started in 1908, in New York City thousands of women united and marched for the right to vote, better labor laws, and better work conditions.

February 28, 1909 a gathering was organized in Manhattan for what was called the first National Women's Day. The gathering was held to honor the march and protest in 1908.

In 1910 the Socialist International proposed and established a Women's Day to honor the movement towards women's rights and to build support for achieving universal voting rights for women.

On March 8, 1911, International Women's Day was formally honored by Germany, Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland.

In March of 1972, a federal civil rights law, Title IX, passed in the U.S. protecting people from sex discrimination in federal education programs.

In 1978 an organization based in California, realized the lack of information about women's history included in school curriculums. They initiated the first celebration of Women's History Week. By 1980, President Carter proclaimed the week of March 8 as National Women's History Week.

"When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful."

- Malala Yousafzai

As a result of the national recognition by 1986, 14 states individually declared March Women's History Month. Between 1987 and 1994, Congress passed laws and resolutions requesting and authorizing the President to proclaim March of each year as **Women's History Month**.



Women's History Month

The Foundation of the Corner Health Center

by Nancy N. Margolis, Co-Founder of Corner Health Center

Joan Schloessinger Chesler was a Co-Founder and the Founding Executive Director of the Corner Health Center for three decades.

Seldom does a strong leader also possess such compassion, patience, foresight and guts as Joan Chesler. Starting the Corner Health Center was no easy task. There was no money and few resources. But that did not deter Joan. There was opposition from groups who considered the agency a threat. Yet that never deterred Joan. She worked and struggled toward her goal to provide high quality health care to the young people of the county, especially those in poverty. Joan somehow knew that the Corner could and would be successful – but it took Joan's doing to make it happen. Joan truly cared about every teenager who came to the Corner. She understood them, encouraged them and changed their lives.

Never in our grandest dreams could we have envisioned what the Corner Health Center has become today. Never could we have imagined the amazing programs and outstanding agency that Joan built.

The Corner Health Center could not have survived and grown without Joan's brilliance, skills, steadfast determination, personal hard work, long hours and nurturing. While the early days were difficult, Joan never seemed discouraged – only challenged and invigorated by the task. The Corner owes its sheer existence and its unbelievable success to Joan's amazing guidance and leadership.



“If you don't risk anything, you risk even more.”

- Erica Jong

Women's History Month

Remembering My Dear Friend Letitia

by Dr. Joetta Mial



I am pleased to be able to write a little something during Women's History month to remember my friend, the legendary **Letitia Johnson Byrd**. Letitia was a friend to the entire community, as an advocate, supporter, activist and "super spreader" volunteer. Her service to the community was well documented in the Ann Arbor News' as its first "Citizen of the Year." At that time she belonged to 22 different organizations, and Corner Health was one of them. She had all of these bags of folders for each group lined up around the house. And she

seemed to have tickets to sell for all of them. Her friends would lovingly say "Here she comes again, but we would all end up buying tickets because she was so passionate, persistent and persuasive for the causes. Letitia loved music, had beautiful voice and sang in multiple choirs. We went to a lot of concerts together.

Letitia had a profound influence on me. We knew each other for 50 plus years and both of us were educators in the Ann Arbor Public Schools through challenging and good times. While together at Huron High School, when she was a counselor and I was an assistant principal at the time, we were granted a sabbatical to study the academic achievement of African American students. The data and information we obtained became a Black Youth Study for the Ann Arbor Public Schools and my PhD dissertation. She was responsible for me joining the Ann Arbor Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, the Ann Arbor Chapter of the Links, and upon my retirement, several nonprofit organizations. Letitia lead a good and caring life. In the Ann Arbor school system, she moved through the ranks from teacher to central administrator, but noted that counseling students was the most rewarding. Letitia had a big heart and passed away on Valentine's Day, 2018—how fitting.

**"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured
by the compassionate actions of its members."**

-Coretta Scott King

Women's History Month

Fierce Advocate for Children & Families

by Sharman Spieser

Sophia Dubreuil is my hero. She is a beloved friend who started out as a colleague, who has made a huge difference in my life and, as a Head Start/Great Start Readiness Program teacher, in the lives of hundreds of children in our community and their families, every day of the 30+ years I've known her.

My friend and inspiration grew up in New York, the daughter of Haitian immigrants Antoine and Marie-Solange Dubreuil. In 1986 she accepted a full track scholarship to The University of Michigan and graduated from there in 1990 with a bachelor's degree in psychology. We met then, when Sophia stayed in Ann Arbor and began working as a school-age childcare supervisor with the Ann Arbor Public Schools. In 1996 she returned to school and obtained an elementary teaching certificate at Eastern Michigan University while completing a second bachelor's degree in social science and art. As part of her continuing commitment to children, Sophia also went on to earn a master's degree in early childhood education.

Her many educational attainments are in themselves inspirational, but the fact that Sophia managed to achieve them while working full time and (much of the time) as a single parent, is only the foundation of my respect for Sophia. Layered upon that is the awe of watching her weather personal challenges while managing the systemic and individual disrespects Black women confront daily. She does so with fierce determination to advocate for, teach and nurture the fullest potential of the children who are her students - all while mentoring teachers-to-be, student teachers, assistants and new teachers.

I cannot describe what I see Sophia doing any more effectively than bell hooks in her book, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*.

"Knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know."

"...it is the most militant, most radical intervention anyone can make to not only speak of love, but to engage in the practice of love. For love as the foundation of all social movements for self-determination is the only way we create a world that domination and dominator thinking cannot destroy. Anytime we do the work of love we are doing the work of ending domination."

Ms. Sophia, as she is called by her students and their parents, conducts the most radical intervention anyone can by engaging in the practice of love. Our community benefits so much from Sophia Dubreuil's unwavering commitment, and years in service, to it.



Photo taken by Jo Mathis, AAPS District News Editor, 2017

Women's History Month

The Change Agent Who Does it All

by Lori Watanabe Saginaw

I want to name **Dr. Lisa R. Jackson** as a woman who inspires me greatly in this present moment. Her statement, “The thing I love about my life is that I am never bored,” exactly captures her *joie de vivre*. I watch in awe as Lisa weds her knowledge of the brain’s science with her heart’s commitment to achieve decency and equity in every arena where change is needed in our social structures and systems.

Whether serving on the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards, as past Board President of Ozone House, or as a behavioral science researcher and psychology professor who cheerleads civil rights, human rights, and racial and gender equity, Lisa is a remarkable change agent. Her enthusiasm, feistiness, knowledge, and resourcefulness enable her to commit to the long haul. In complex issues, she finds the precise steps required and will willingly speak her mind to benefit many.



Photo taken by Nathan Gartner, Schoolcraft Community College 2014

The components of her outstanding leadership are her commitment to collaboration and the fact that she is never blinded by ego, is always self-reflective and caring, is no nonsense and methodical in examining each situation from all sides, and operates with the highest integrity. How fortunate we are for the hundreds of hours Lisa voluntarily gives to chair Ann Arbor’s Independent Community Police Oversight Commission. Thank you, Lisa. I feel so fortunate and proud to know you.

**“You can waste your lives drawing lines.
Or you can live your life crossing them.”
- Shonda Rhimes**

Women's History Month

Honoring the Path Paved

Fannie Lou Hamer lived in the Mississippi Delta and was one of the most powerful people in the civil rights movement in the south. With only a 12-year-old education, she rose to become a SNCC organizer working to secure voting rights for her people. One time, her group was harassed on their way home from a voting rights meeting in a bus when they were stopped by the police. They were fined \$100 for the violation of “the bus was too yellow”.

She is also responsible for integrating the national Democratic Party by founding the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964. Through this work she became the first Black convention delegate in 1968.

“Righteousness exalts a nation. Hate just makes people miserable.”

—Fannie Lou Hamer



When she grew frustrated with politics, she turned to economic empowerment for Black farmers. She began a “pig bank” to provide free pigs for Black farmers to breed, raise and sell. She started the Freedom Farm Coop to purchase land that Blacks could own and farm collectively and launched a coop store, a boutique and a sewing enterprise--all to help her neighbors to improve their own situation. She was a force to be reckoned with. She taught me that each one of us can be the change we want to see.

by Julie Steiner



I met **Irene Butter** when I joined Zeitouna, an Arab/Jewish women's dialogue group she founded whose mission is “to embody, model and promote the peaceful, just and sustainable coexistence of the Arab

An acrostic poem I wrote in honor of Irene's 90th birthday:

*You are an **I**ntrepid woman
living your life **R**ighteously
and **cr**Eatively
facing **challe**Nges with
GracE*

*The world is a **B**etter place
beca**U**se you
inhab**I**t
Happy 90th BirThday to you dear Irene!
May you **E**njoy beautiful days
Know you are surRounded by love*

and Jewish peoples through connection, trust, empathy and action”. Reading her memoir: Shores Beyond Shores: From Holocaust to Hope, I was struck by Irene's resilience and compassion surviving Bergen-Belsen and being sent to Algiers on her own as a 14-year-old. Irene had fortitude like the youth who come to the Corner Health Center. Throughout her life she has found joy along with struggle. Irene Butter exemplifies what it means to be an activist/humanist/educator for the “long haul”.

by Johanna Epstein

Women's History Month

My Mentor, My Inspiration

by Congresswoman Debbie Dingell



Long before I arrived in Congress, I was a car girl working at General Motors. In my time at GM, I had the honor and opportunity to work with **Marina von Neumann Whitman**. Over the years, Marina became a trusted mentor who taught me how to navigate a world that wasn't always welcoming to women. She never asked for a seat at the table, she demanded one. And when she pulled up a chair, she wasn't about to let her voice be ignored. For me, the lessons she taught me were invaluable as I continued my career at GM and entered public service.

After leaving GM, Marina entered a new chapter of her life as Professor at the University of Michigan where she shared her broad knowledge and experience with our next generation of leaders. Though she has always been at the forefront of her industry and her fields of learning, she has always been selfless, kind, and compassionate. She never hesitated to offer a wise word

about work and community to her colleagues. She encouraged me to pursue a graduate degree and even helped guide many of her peers through love, marriage, and relationships. Because to Marina, wisdom isn't just something to accumulate for her own personal gain, it is something to be shared. As we lift up women across our country and around the world this month, we must recognize women like Marina who have dedicated their lives to not just furthering their own careers but those of their peers and colleagues. I am proud to consider Marina a friend, mentor, and inspiration.

by Harshini Anand, Corner Health Youth Board & Youth Leadership Council Member



There have been many incredible, brilliant women in my life that have influenced me and led my becoming my current self. However, there is one that I still now feel the impact of her work despite first hearing of it years ago. **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** — an immensely talented Nigerian writer, recipient of several prestigious literature awards, and diligent activist.

I remember reading her book "We Should All Be Feminists" when I was in 8th grade and feeling completely changed. Her views on what it means to be a feminist and to function as a woman in society today resonated with me deeply. Somehow, it felt as if she had reached inside of me and laid out all of the intangible emotions I couldn't digest and more. I searched her up, ordered a few of her books from my local library, and watched her TED Talks online. Her works, filled with raw experiences and incredible writing prowess, are some I continue to visit and re-visit even now. Despite not using much flowery language, she gracefully addresses and delivers her message in a way that anyone can understand. This very same grace can be seen in

her advocacy work for women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, religious freedom, and more.

In her speech for the PEN World Voices, Adichie said, "To choose to write is to reject silence." She is the complete embodiment of that. With a stroke of a pen, Adichie strives to use her voice and writing to spread a message, one of equality and respect, and she encourages girls around the world to do the same - myself included. Reading her book so many years ago inspired me to starting writing some prose and poetry, and with her invisible support, I won a national arts and writing contest that very year. While I am not as active of a writer now, Adichie taught me and so many others to use my voice in the ways that matter. I too have a meaningful opinion. I too can speak up. And, I too can reject silence.

Women's History Month

Tribute to Barbara Meadows

by Janet Haynes

When I think of women who have been role models and a source of inspiration in my life, I am blessed that there have been several. I always look to my mother, Harriette Carrington, who showed me by example how to move through this world with purpose, grace and dignity, and how to care for others, by giving of herself and being a supportive friend. She was a deeply religious woman who lived according to Jesus's teachings to "love your neighbor as yourself." This was demonstrated by her community service of volunteerism, and her support and encouragement of young people who were pursuing educational and employment opportunities. I learned from her that "when much is given, much is required."



Barbara Jean Meadows is also a role model. For more than 60 years, Barbara Meadows's life was dedicated to the preservation of African American culture, the servicing of the underserved, to public service, and to the arts, our youth, and the citizens of our community. She was taught by her parents the importance of a life of Christian service, and her dedication to community service was due in large measure to that foundation. "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give" epitomized Barbara's life. Barbara was a strong believer in encouraging and patronizing young people starting businesses, and in advancing their academic and career goals. She was also passionate and dedicated in helping local college students who aspired to a career in the arts.

Barbara's life was dedicated to public service and her heart for our community was evidenced by her many civic and cultural affiliations. Besides being a founding member of the Ann Arbor Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a founding member of the Ann Arbor Chapter of Links, a long-time member of the Willis Patterson Our Own Thing Chorale, and a founding member of the African American Endowment Fund, a Field of Interest of the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, Inc., she

was a member of and served on the board of numerous organizations. She also received several awards and recognitions for her community service.

I have been blessed by knowing Barbara, in having so many opportunities to collaborate with her in many of these organizations, and to call her my friend. Barbara was the epitome of intellect, selfless service and grace. Many of us found her to be the ultimate role model for Black womanhood. Her stamp will forever be on lives of all she touched.

"You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own."

- Michelle Obama

Women's History Month

“trails of grace” A Poem

by Dr. Melba Joyce Boyd

for my mother, Dorothy Wynn Clore

as your hair curves
into moonlight
and your skin glows
into red sundown,
your eyes still gleam
like sunrise.
the veins rising
around your fingers
are like rivers
shaping mountains,
where you showed
children the power
of their natural bodies,
the muscle in their
thinking,
the beauty of
integrity,
the trails of labor
offered with grace.

you leave the school
during uneasy times.
the classrooms are chained
from within and without.
the corridors are surrounded
by loaded guns and
uncertainty.
the neighborhoods are haunted
by the encroachment of dope
and young, black death.

the fear in our faces
separates us into shadows.
the clamor of our conversations
echoes the rhetoric
of institutional deficit
busy with bureaucratic
paper and educated excuses
to sustain
organized apathy.

your retirement
renders a deeper sigh,
but the rivers and valleys
you mapped hold
the wonder silence
that follows your lessons
of perseverance,
of commitment,
and of sound,
common sense.

Admirable Characteristics

by Jean Nelson

for the women in my life

I have a number of friends whose characteristics I admire so am describing a composite rather than identifying a single person.

I have a good friend who has two adult children on the Asperger spectrum. Her life is centered around their care, ensuring a viable future, assisting them in coping with immediate challenges. I think she exhibits amazing empathy, compassion and most of all, personal sacrifice.

I have two friends who are coping with the physical challenges of Parkinson's Disease. Adapting to their increasingly limited capabilities while engaging in the rigors of new physical regimens demonstrates courage and grace in the process of letting go of their previous selves.

In my last work experience, I had a supervisor who personified generosity in the workplace. She always acknowledged my and other's contributions to the success of a project. Her inclusiveness promoted a sense of shared responsibility and achievement.

Meticulousness is a trait that I have always admired. My hairdresser and pedicurist are as careful when cutting hair or applying polish as a surgeon might be in a delicate operation. It isn't the chore that is important, but the care with which one executes it.

And while I don't personally know a great deal about Stacey Abrams' history, it is clear that she has engineered a real change in the outcomes of recent elections with persistence and the ability to organize and energize others to work in the tedium of executing the everyday tasks required to achieve long range goals.

Women's History Month

Phenomenal Woman

by S. Joy Gaines



I heard about **Linda Edwards-Brown** before I met her. The first person to tell me about her, told me I had to meet her because she is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and so am I. He kept a huge secret - Linda Edwards-Brown is a phenomenon.

**"I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me."
-Maya Angelou**

It was too many years later that I finally got to meet Linda in person. I got to meet her in her capacity as the Court Administrator of the Washtenaw County Juvenile Court. Very shortly after, I got to see her incredible leadership. Several Washtenaw County employees who had duties at the then Juvenile Courthouse on Platt Road had offices in the United Way Building, myself included. A few months after I moved into my office in the United Way Building, an arsonist set fire to the building. Our offices were destroyed. LEB, as her staff called her, while the rest of us were in court or

otherwise trying to carry out our duties after the fact, came to work in her jeans (and she is always dressed to the T - even in jeans). She, The Juvenile Court Administrator, went through the ashes and rubble salvaging files, photos, and mementos. That is leadership: Taking care of what needs to be done, no matter how messy.

That story doesn't even tell you half of how amazing soror Linda is. I had the opportunity to sit in a meeting with her when she was tasked with organizing Washtenaw County's first ever Annual Family Reunification Day to celebrate families that had successfully and safely reunified after a period of time in foster care. She was tasked with planning the event in 4 weeks, almost to the day. In those 4 weeks, LEB created a team that enabled 20 something families to be present for a celebration. One of the Michigan Supreme Court Justices spoke at the program. Several parents spoke of their experience. There were T-shirts for all the families, sponsors, and volunteers. There was food - lots of food. And there was a TEAM cooking, playing games with the children, giving out gift bags. Yes, gift bags! Plus there was media coverage. Never have I ever seen anyone pull off that size an event, successfully, in such a short time. Amazing! Linda did all of these amazing things at her day job and more at her other job as a professor of social work at Eastern Michigan University. At EMU she inspires students to be passionate professionals.

A few years ago soror Linda retired from Washtenaw County but her service to and in our County continues. She is an incredibly active member of the Washtenaw County Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. She chairs the scholarship committee and is present for pretty much every service project and activity. Linda continues to teach social work, but now also teaches at the University of Michigan. In 2020 she was re-elected to the Pittsfield Charter Township Board of Trustees.

Remarkably, Linda does so much for the community while being an incredible wife, mother, and soror. She is known in our chapter for her sisterly notes, texts, and calls at just the right time. And she manages to do all that looking like Boss Queen every day! Like I said, Linda Edwards-Brown is a phenomenon.

Women's History Month

A Woman Who Makes A Difference Everyday

by Marianne Udow-Phillips



I have admired my friend, **Congresswoman Debbie Dingell** from the time I first got to know her in the late 1990's when I joined the Board of Directors of the Michigan Women's Foundation (now, Michigan Women Forward). At the time, Debbie was heading the GM Foundation and commuting back and forth to Washington, DC. She was married to one of the most powerful men in the country, Congressman John Dingell, then Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee. But, she was always a powerhouse in her own right. My earliest memories of Debbie were about how committed she was to the issues she cared about, how she was literally everywhere at the same time and how hard she worked. These traits, so true then, are so true now.

I have journeyed with Debbie through her work at the Foundation, her work in DC, her work for the community, her support and love of John – who adored her – through his life, career and death, and through becoming a Congresswoman herself.

Debbie's work for social justice, for gun control, for better mental health care and for better care for seniors have all been born from personal experience. She has shared with all of us her own personal stories of living in a family with

mental health issues and gun violence. She has shared with us her own experience in navigating the health care system to get the care that John needed. And, she has shared with us her deep convictions about human dignity and caring in these challenging and divisive times.

Debbie represents a district that reflects the breadth of views of the country – including its divisions. She has experienced the anger of too many personally – she's been spit on and accosted for standing up for social justice and democracy. Yet, she continues to reach out and reach across to build bridges and not walls. And, she never goes far from those she serves. In every way she can, she is with the people of all walks of life in her district.

These have been difficult times, but Debbie has stayed true to her calling and who she is – deeply caring, hard-working and open. She has shared herself. She is real. She is courageous. She is a woman I deeply admire and she has made a difference for all of us.

The mission of the Corner Health Center is to inspire 12- to 25-year-olds (and their children) to achieve and sustain healthy lives by providing judgment-free, affordable health and wellness care and education.

We cover comprehensive health care, behavioral health services, health education and youth development programs designed exclusively for teens and young adults.

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