



GGMG's Community Support: A Continuing Legacy of Giving Back

The drives program provides GGMG members an opportunity to make a difference in our community through support of local nonprofits

By Bobby Shukla and Jessica Williams

Many moms join GGMG in search of community and remain involved because the organization has enriched their lives. Those benefits are precisely the purpose of GGMG's Community Support Committee, whose mission is to impact members' lives for the better and create a sense of community amongst members.

Community support comprises three programs: member support, events, and drives. While member support provides assistance to members experiencing challenging times, and the events team provides helpful seminars such as CPR or self-defense training, the drives program is aimed at giving back. It identifies local nonprofits with which GGMG can partner to raise funds and awareness and has a proven track record of making a difference in our community.

GGMG mom Corinna Lu has served as co-chair of drives since March 2015. As co-chair, Lu spearheads the planning effort for various drives throughout the year, organizing donations of diapers for the Homeless Prenatal Program, books for the Children's Book Project, clothing for Dress for Success in conjunction with the Jewish Community Center, as well as toy drives, and even an impromptu breast pump drive. Lu says, "it feels good to know we're helping to support organizations that resonate with us."

Although the drives may change from year to year, the program tends to focus on smaller, local organizations to make a difference in the community. Tiffany Bindoo, who

serves as board liaison to the Community Support Committee and supports the work of the co-chairs of the committee, says, "it is exciting to partner with new organizations, and always rewarding to go back to our regular partners. I really enjoy the opportunity to give back to our community."

Homeless Prenatal Program: a long-time partner

The drives program has an ongoing relationship with the Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP), a local family resource center founded in 1989 to partner with and support low-income families to break the cycle of childhood poverty. HPP currently serves 4,000 low-income and homeless families annually, providing a variety of programs and services (including job training) to help families

become healthy, stable, and self-sufficient.

More than half of HPP's talented staff are formerly homeless mothers who were clients. Former client Heshima describes her experience at HPP as a positive, nurturing one: "I always felt like I could be a leader. HPP helped me fulfill my potential."

GGMG holds two annual drives for HPP: a diapers and wipes drive in the spring and a funds drive in December. The 2015 funds drive raised a record \$23,000. As part of that drive, Elizabeth Jansson, co-chair of the Community Support Committee's events program, organized a showing of *Toy Story*, complete with a popcorn machine and balloon animals, to thank donors and provide an opportunity for GGMG members, their children, and HPP members to meet.

Sharon Bechtol, HPP volunteer and donations coordinator, says, "We love GGMG and are so fortunate to have their support for our families." Bechtol values the unique benefits that come from mothers helping other mothers: "GGMG members know how difficult it can be to have a newborn and small children and understand what HPP's moms are going through." As a recent example, when HPP sought breast pumps for its clients, GGMG moms answered the call by donating high-quality Medela breast pumps to help make breastfeeding a little easier on new moms receiving services at HPP.

Happening right now

Many times, ideas for new drives come from members' suggestions, such as the idea for this year's Children's Book Project drive, which Lu found on the GGMG online discussion forums. The Children's Book Project was founded in 1992 by San Francisco mother and credentialed reading specialist Vicki Pollack. It collects new and gently used books to distribute to hospitals, daycares, shelters, and other community organizations for Bay Area children in need and gives away close to 150,000 books annually.

It feels good to know we're helping to support organizations that resonate with us.

The Children's Book Project "was born out of compassion," says Violeta Krasnic, its executive director. "It's really about compassion and love for learning and love for our kids." Krasnic captures the joy of seeing the organization's mission in action each day: "My heart is full and my work feels relevant."

For this year's drive, the Community Support Committee is collecting new and used books at popular indoor playspaces Peek-a-Boo Factory, Peekadoodle, and Recess through April 15. The Children's Book Project is always in need of used books (from infant to teenage levels), particularly board books, elementary

school books, and books written in Spanish or Mandarin. The organization also accepts monetary donations that it uses to purchase books.

Concurrent with the book drive, community support is collecting toys and baby gear for the Felton Institute's Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Program (TAPP). TAPP offers programs to pregnant teens and young parents as part of the Felton Institute, the oldest nonsectarian, nonprofit social service provider in San Francisco. TAPP partners with Hilltop High School, and its many services include

onsite childcare for teenage mothers attending core classes needed to graduate. The Felton Institute's TAPP Young Family Resource Center also offers classes on a variety of topics such as prenatal health, child development, and early literacy. Mim Shafer, parent education coordinator for TAPP, is most proud of the organization's work in supporting young adults "to parent with dignity despite adverse circumstances."

Toy drives—not just for the holidays

Other drives have supported groups such as the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program,

the oldest and largest organized firefighter toy program in the country. GGMG first partnered with the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program about eight years ago after a GGMG mother contacted the organization to coordinate a volunteer opportunity for her daughter. Although often associated with the holiday season, the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program actually provides toys for community organizations and Bay Area children in need year-round.

As first responders, firefighters frequently see children who have been burned out of their homes or have become victims of other disasters. "The first things the parents are replacing are, of course, not toys," says Sally Casazza, chairperson for the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program, explaining that parents are busy trying to find a new home and replace clothes or items needed for school.

Recently, the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program provided an entire family with new bicycles after responding to a call of a child's foot caught in bicycle spokes. Because firefighters cut the spokes to free the child, the family was left without a bicycle, which happened to be shared by all the siblings—ages 4 to 14. The San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program not only replaced the bicycle but provided each sibling with a new, appropriately sized one.

Because the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program accepts donations year-round, it is able to respond throughout the year to children in need. In fact, many donations come in after the December holidays from business toy drives or children who have a surplus of gifts they wish to donate. Last year, the San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program provided toys to 31,000 families. Each child received four age-appropriate toys. "We don't toot our own horn a lot," says Casazza, "but we really do make a difference here in San Francisco."

Supporting GGMG members' organizations

GGMG also supports local nonprofits founded by its members, such as Project Night Night. Founded by Kendra Robins, a former corporate lawyer, Project Night Night provides packages to homeless children who need childhood essentials to foster a sense of security during times of upheaval in their

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED	GGMG COMMUNITY SUPPORT COMMITTEE Please donate to or help with a GGMG drive by assisting with collections and drop-offs. Suggest a local nonprofit for GGMG to support or serve as co-chair for events, a position that community support is currently looking to fill. For all the above, contact Corinna Lu at drives@ggm.org .
	CHILDREN'S BOOK PROJECT The Children's Book Project always needs children's gently used or new books and welcomes monetary donations. Adult volunteers can help sort and organize books, and children can help by organizing their own book drives. www.childrensbookproject.org
	DRESS FOR SUCCESS Dress for Success helps disadvantaged women find economic independence by providing professional attire and career development tools. You can donate new or nearly-new suits, business-appropriate apparel, shoes or accessories like handbags, jewelry, and unused cosmetics at 500 Sutter St., Suite 218. sanfrancisco.dressforsuccess.org
	HOMELESS PRENATAL PROJECT (HPP) HPP always welcomes donations and has a wish list on its website. The website also lists a variety of ways to volunteer, including opportunities in its technology center assisting clients with basic computer work, like setting up email accounts and creating resumes. www.homelessprenatal.org
	PROJECT NIGHT NIGHT Project Night Night relies entirely on donations from individuals and companies. Please visit the website for a wish list of donation items or to learn how to make a monetary donation. The organization also encourages a "Birthday Hero Program" that enables people to collect donation items at their children's birthday parties. www.projectnightnight.org
	SAN FRANCISCO FIREFIGHTERS TOY PROGRAM The San Francisco Firefighters Toy Program always needs toys and welcomes monetary donations. Adults and children can volunteer by making greeting cards or categorizing toys and stocking shelves at the organization's warehouse. www.sffirefightertoy.org
	TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND PARENTING PROGRAM (TAPP) TAPP currently needs some big-ticket items as donations, including baby carriers, diaper bags, strollers, nursing guards, diapers, board books (especially in Spanish), pumping bras, unused pumping equipment, disposable nursing pads, and gift cards for grocery stores, baby gear stores, etc. felton.org/about-us/make-a-difference/donate

lives, such as when they first become homeless and go to a shelter. Each package includes a new blanket, book, and stuffed animal. Robins made 1,200 packages on her living room floor her first year and now the organization provides 35,000 packages to 300 shelters nationwide. For some children, the package's stuffed animal is the first new toy that child has ever received.

For the last two years, GGMG has organized a drive for Project Night Night in the fall. Robins describes the partnership with GGMG as "wonderful" and reminds us that small

actions can have a big effect. "GGMG's reach is wide. Even if just 10 percent of its members take action, that may not initially seem big but is, in fact, substantial." ♦

Bobby Shukla is a lawyer who represents employees in a variety of employment law areas, including discrimination, harassment, disability accommodation, retaliation, whistle-blowing, and severance negotiations.

Jessica Williams is a former teacher and lawyer. Her writing has appeared on Lucie's List, A Survival Guide for New Moms.

GGMG Love: Our Members' Perspectives

GGMG literally changed my life. I had been a member since I was pregnant, but didn't really do a whole lot. Then my husband and I split up. I wanted to stay a GGMG member, but the \$75 fee was a lot. I renewed anyway and decided to start volunteering so that I wouldn't have to pay again. Through volunteering, I met Vicki and was encouraged to join the single mom subgroup. By that point, I was already divorced and didn't want to attend. She kept encouraging me to go and mentioned that it might be nice for someone to speak about how things can be positive post-divorce.

I finally went. I met so many women who are in the same situation as me and have the same struggles I do. I now have a core group of friends that I met only because of GGMG and who are my rock. Not only do we plan outings together with our kids, we plan moms only type outings as well. Then I joined the GGMG board and made another group of friends. Because of these new found friendships, I gained the courage to sign up for dating sites and now I even have a boyfriend as well!

I used to basically stay in my jammies and feel sorry for myself all weekend and now because of

GGMG, I'm sometimes busy ALL weekend and my DVR is full.

—Addie Bjornsen

In some ways I feel like GGMG saved my life. I spent two years living through secondary infertility including five pregnancy losses. The support I received from the community was a lifeline for me to sort out how to move forward and face what I was going through.

There are a ton of other reasons I value GGMG, but the secondary infertility support is the top reason. When I became pregnant for the sixth time, and when that pregnancy worked and I birthed a healthy baby, the community continued to support me through the challenges of sleep deprivation, low milk supply, etc.

a member

I've been a member of GGMG for eight years now, and I love the forum the most. It is by far the most valuable resource I've tapped since becoming a mom. Whether it's asking for parenting advice or questions about hair salons, I love sharing and networking with

the variety of parents on this forum. It's helped open my eyes to people's differences and allowed me to be more accepting and understanding which has led to much personal growth.

Thank you GGMG for providing this community!

—Angie Hall

GGMG has been an amazing resource for me. I moved to SF from the East Coast two and a half years ago with a 2 year old and 7 month old. I knew about five people and was struggling as a SAHM with no childcare help. Through GGMG I figured out which playgrounds were enclosed so I could let the 2 year old roam while I fed the baby, indoor play spaces, how to apply to preschools, and met some wonderful moms at playgroup events. I could go on and on. And the virtual support network has been amazing for me. I've now transitioned back to full time professional work, and GGMG continues to be a great resource for how to balance a job and kids and life hacks to make things easier. Thank you!

—Julie Patel

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