

## **Giving Tree Collection Makes an Immediate Impact**

*By Michael O'Loughlin, Marketing and Communications Director*

The Benedict Center has expressed their gratitude to our sisters, associates, staff, and tenants who contributed so generously to last month's "Giving Tree" collection of wish list items for the Sisters Program South drop-in center. Our U.S. Province is a founding member of the Sisters Program South collaborative.

Kim Miller, the drop-in center supervisor, said she was in the process of planning which items would need to be purchased for the new year when Sister Margaret Kwiatkowski, Sister Deb Fumagalli, Sister Carol Rigali, and other team helpers arrived to drop off the collected items. Donations included boxes and bags filled with coats, pants in all sizes, tops, boots, shoes, socks, hats, mittens, gloves, scarves, blankets, toothpaste and toothbrushes, hygiene items, and snacks to be used for outreach.

"I was overwhelmed by the donation," Kim said. "We won't have to make any purchases for two or three months!"



"The kindness of the School Sisters of St. Francis community saved valuable time and money for the program," said Jeanne Geraci, executive director of the Benedict Center. "But most importantly, it reminded the women served by the Sisters Program that they are cared for. That is the greatest gift."

"In taking the donations to Sisters South Program, Joel Love had to remove some of the seats of the van to accommodate all the boxes," said Sister Margaret, who served as the point person for the collection. "When we first arrived, we began taking the boxes from the van with a shopping cart, but soon a staff member brought a large flatbed wagon. One of the staff members commented on the box of snacks that she could use immediately for the women who drop in. She also mentioned that there had been requests for hats, mittens, and scarfs."

"The collection boxes in Maria Linden needed to be emptied more than six times during the collection drive. It was always overflowing with the generosity of our sisters and tenants," said Heidi Grow, human resources manager for our international office. "The box in the Chapel

Offices had been emptied more than three times from our employees and business tenants. We had called upon the generosity of Maria Linden and Chapel Offices throughout 2021, and this was by far the most generous collection I have ever experienced. Cash donations were also received, which helped to purchase small individual bottles of shampoo and soap, in addition to other items on the 'greatest needs' list."

Sonia Riecan, human resources manager for the U.S. Province, had a similar experience with the collection at Sacred Heart. "There was a lot of excitement to donate to Sisters Program South and it was great to see the wonderful response," she said.

The Benedict Center's Sisters Program helps women engaged in the street sex trade find hope to lead healthier, safer lives, explained Melinda Hughes, Sisters Program director. "Some women are trafficked – forced, coerced, or manipulated into the sex trade by someone else. Many were first exploited as minors. Others trade sex due to circumstances including poverty, homelessness, trauma, and substance-use disorders.

"The Sisters Program offers street outreach and two drop-in centers, including Sisters Program South, where women can safely rest and receive crisis management, counseling, advocacy, and assistance connecting to housing and other resources."

Thanks to everyone whose kindness helped make the season brighter for those in need this Christmas!