

# ANNUAL Report



# 2023



Gifts of Love

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# A Note

FROM OUR

## Executive Director

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“All of this work is only possible because of our strong partnerships, dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and amazing staff.”



L I S A   G R A Y

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Hello, Friends,

2023 was a year of tremendous growth for Gifts of Love. We marked 34 years of serving the basic needs of low-income individuals and families, and saw our largest increase in clients served in our history.

With the economic downturn and ongoing inflation throughout the U. S., families continued to struggle to make ends meet, and Gifts of Love was there to help fill in the financial gaps by providing much-needed food, clothing, and household items, allowing families to direct their income to other essential needs such as rent and mortgage payments.

Gifts of Love served over 2,800 household members throughout Greater Hartford - twice the number we served in 2022. Clients came from as far northeast as Broad Brook, as far south as Meriden, and as far west as Torrington and Waterbury. Our combined Avon and Hartford offices saw an 87% increase in client visits over 2022, with our Hartford office seeing a whopping 224% increase.

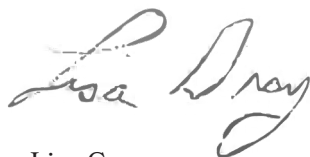
Each month, an average of 329 clients, representing over 2,800 household members, visited our Avon and Hartford offices to shop for fresh food, cleaning and hygiene products, clothing, and household items, and we provided over 35 boxes of food to seniors 62 and over through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP); every other Tuesday, we served 80 to 100 people through our mobile food distribution sites; through our Retail Rescue program, we picked up and distributed over 44,000 pounds of food from local grocery stores that would have otherwise gone to waste; we shared 6,000 pounds of food through our Neighbors Helping Neighbors program to various senior living communities, the Salvation Army, and soup kitchens; we provided 240 clients and their families with all the fixings to prepare a Thanksgiving meal, from the turkey to cranberry sauce; and we filled over 260 backpacks each week with meals, snacks, and drinks, and distributed them to students throughout the Greater Hartford area and Torrington who receive free or reduced-cost lunches to help feed them and their families through the weekend.

In August, Gifts of Love provided all client children aged 5 to 18 with fully-stocked new backpacks so they'd have a successful start to the new school year; in December, we set up our annual Holiday Shoppe, and 239 client families received gift cards and were able to shop for new toys and other items for their families; and, during the cold weather seasons, Gifts of Love administers the CT Operation Fuel program for residents of the Farmington Valley, providing emergency assistance of up to \$1,000 to residents struggling to pay their energy and utility bills. In 2023, we assisted 48 households.

All of this work is only possible because of our strong partnerships, dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and amazing staff. We are excited to share this report with you, which is a result of their continuous and varied contributions.

2024 promises to be another year of successfully serving our community, and we look forward to expanding our programs to serve more families in new and creative ways. We hope you'll continue to follow and support us to see what's new!

Warmest regards,



Lisa Gray

Executive Director

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*“We’re keeping hope alive that things will get better...I’m sharing a bed with my daughter and my son sleeps on the couch” -*



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# Mission

## STATEMENT

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**The mission of Gifts of Love is to help meet the basic needs of individuals and families in the Greater Hartford area experiencing a short-term financial crisis so they can return to self-sufficiency.**

# About

## GIFTS OF LOVE

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***“I loved the help, I loved the experience. You guys are so nice...”***

Founded in 1989, Gifts of Love is devoted to the needs of the community and responds to the needs of individuals and families who have been impacted by a financial crisis through the distribution of food, clothing and household necessities, empowering them toward a path to self-sufficiency.

The organization primarily serves people facing a financial crisis due to reduced work hours, illness, divorce, death of a spouse/mate, exiting an abusive relationship, or a significant unexpected increase in expenses.

By helping clients meet their most basic needs through food, clothing, housewares and energy assistance through Operation Fuel, clients are able to divert their income to other necessities such as rent/mortgage, debt reduction, and medications/medical bills and regain their financial independence.

Your donations directly impact people in need in the community YOU live in.



## WHO ARE OUR CLIENTS?

- A mixture of single and two-parent households, senior citizens, college students, and individuals who come to us directly, or through referrals from other agencies
- Often, our clients include an overlooked population who are above the federal poverty level and, therefore, not eligible for supplemental programs

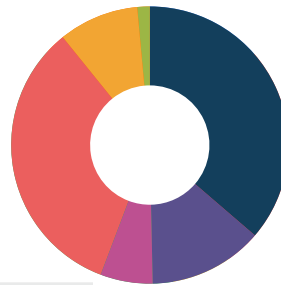


# 2023

## DEMOGRAPHICS

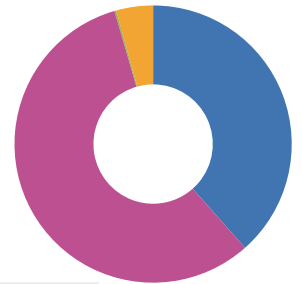
### Total Household Members

● Children aged 0 to 12 years	1024
● Youth aged 13 to 18	377
● Young adults aged 19 to 24	172
● Adults aged 25 to 55	943
● Adults aged 56+	264
● Unknown	41



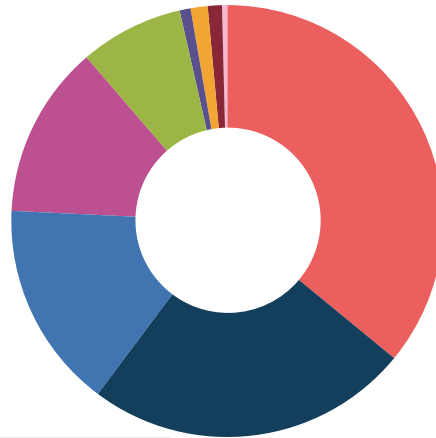
### Household Members by Gender

● Male	1085
● Female	1609
● Non-binary	6
● Unknown	121



### Household Members by Ethnicity

● Latino/Hispanic	1014
● African American/West Indian	685
● Unknown/Prefer Not to Answer	438
● Caucasian	365
● Multi-Racial	219
● Middle Eastern	23
● Asian/Pacific Islander	36
● Other	30
● Native American	11



### Household Members by Education Level

● College or College Degree	187
● High School Diploma or GED	370
● Some High School	95
● Unknown	545
● Other	182



**2821 Clients**

# Our PROGRAMS

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**“We don’t have any groceries left at home. Thank you for the bag.”**

*– Student in Wolcott School District*

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## CLOTHING PANTRY

The Clothing Pantry offers gently used clothing donated by members of our surrounding communities. From winter coats to bathing suits, we change our Clothing Pantry to reflect the seasons. During their monthly visits, our clients may select items for all members of their household. For the “newest” members of our client families, we supply diapers, receiving blankets, crib bedding and baby bottles as well as baby equipment such as strollers, high chairs and car seats.

## HOME GOODS PANTRY

The Home Goods Pantry is stocked with new and used household items. Pots and pans, bedding and bath towels, small appliances and wall décor are among the items our clients can choose from. Selections from our Home Goods pantry help our clients make their houses and apartments feel like home.

## FOOD PANTRY

“Choice” is what makes our Food Pantry unique from other food pantries. Our clients shop as they would in a grocery store and choose the items they prefer. We offer staples such as canned goods and boxed cereals as well as fresh produce, meats and toiletries. The Connecticut food banks, the “retail rescue” program, and generous donations from various churches, schools and families all contribute to the success of our Food Pantry, keeping the shelves stocked and our refrigerators and freezers full.

***“You offered so much more than I expected... my local Food Pantry never has meat or bread like you do”  
– D. P.***

## RETAIL RESCUE PROGRAM

Food banks work with local retailers to connect them with member agencies, such as Gifts of Love, and turn food that would otherwise be considered “food waste” into food donations. Food waste is thousands of pounds of unsold but good food, still safe for consumption, that is thrown away by the food industry. A few examples of food waste are products past their “sell-by date”, oddly shaped or bruised fruits and vegetables, or dented canned goods.

## THE WEEKEND BACKPACK PROGRAM

Did you know that many school-age children go hungry on the weekends? Thanks to a small contingency of volunteers and our generous donors, every week approximately 300 backpacks are filled with food items and distributed to the local schools for children to bring home for the weekends. These backpacks bridge the gap between school and home and eating or not eating.

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### **BACK TO SCHOOL BACKPACK PROGRAM**

Every August, we offer our client families backpacks filled with school supplies, tailored to the various age groups from kindergarten to high school. This program helps give the children of our client families a fresh start to the school year.

### **COMMODITY SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM (CFSP)**

CFSP is a monthly food program for our senior population (aged 62 and older). Foodshare delivers 35 boxes of food to the GOL Avon office. Each box consists of canned fruits, vegetables, proteins, cereal, pasta, sauces, juices, and shelf-stable milk (approximately 36 pounds). There is currently a 10 to 15-person waiting list. Clients pick up at the Avon office, and we deliver a half dozen to the Virginia Connolly Residence in Simsbury.

### **MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION**

This non-qualified food distribution is hosted by Foodshare every other Tuesday at Farmington Valley American Muslim Center in Avon. Foodshare brings their truck, and we distribute what's available. We serve between 75 and 100 people at each event. Each person leaves with about 25 lbs. of fresh fruits and vegetables, bread, frozen meat, and dairy.

### **NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS**

Generally every Friday, Gifts of Love distributes overage from the Avon office that won't make it through the weekend to local subsidized housing facilities in the area. Places include Maple Glen, Whispering Pines, 21 Dowd, Peachtree, Soromundi Commons (YWCA), Virginia Connolly Residence, Salvation Army, and a Torrington soup kitchen. Year-to-date, we have "shared" almost 6,000 lbs. of food that would have gone to waste.

### **OPERATION FUEL**

Operation Fuel is a state program that provides emergency assistance to Connecticut residents struggling to pay energy and utility bills, and advocates for energy affordability. Gifts of Love administers the CT Operation Fuel program for Farmington Valley residents. Each year, we receive an "allowance" from the State that can be distributed to our clients between December and May. The maximum amount each client can receive is \$1,000. In 2023, we assisted 48 households during the cold weather seasons, an increase of 182% over 2022. Clients make an appointment to come into the office, and we process their application with the proper documentation.



**“My pride and ego  
get in the way of  
asking for help,  
but you guys have  
been so kind”  
– R. C.**



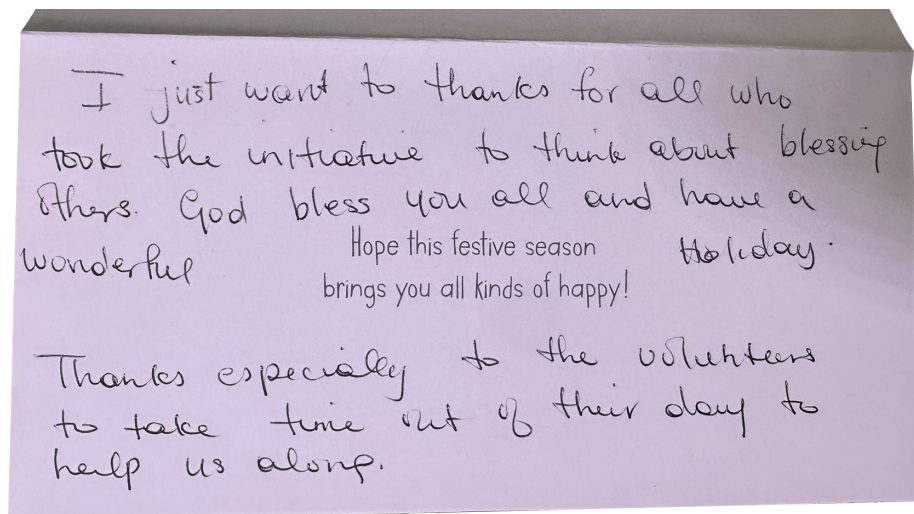


### THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS PROGRAMS

The holidays can be an exciting and fun time of year, but, for many, the holiday only adds further financial stress at a time when it is already difficult to make ends meet. Gifts of Love tries to ease this burden with the help of our holiday programs.

Every November, our client families receive a turkey and all the food necessary to make a traditional Thanksgiving dinner.

In December, we open our “holiday shop”, decorated and filled with brand new merchandise that is generously donated by local families, schools, places of worship, local businesses and corporations. Our holiday shop offers a chance for our clients to do a little holiday shopping for their family members free of charge.



Thank You so much  
for the support, clothes +  
toys. 😊 We are  
So grateful this Holiday  
the Kids will have gifts  
to unwrap. God Bless  
You all and happy  
Holidays.

-2023

That's what  
you're wished  
this Christmas!



Thank you  
for your kindness  
and blessings. This  
year has been one of the  
best for my family and  
your donation along with  
Gifts of Love have kept my  
household afloat. I pray  
that all your holiday  
wishes come true ♡



Wishing you a Christmas season  
filled with warmth and happiness.

# GIFTS OF LOVE

## CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

**MAY 22, 2023**

The 2023 Gifts of Love Charity Golf Tournament and Fall Fundraiser were a huge success - raising vital funds for our basic needs programs!

On May 20, it was a picture-perfect day for friendly competition, exciting auctions and prizes, and the kind hospitality of the Golf Club of Avon.







# FALL IN LOVE

## FALL FUNDRAISER

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**NOVEMBER 3, 2023**

On November 3, our first fall fundraiser since 2019 drew over 120 supporters for dinner, dancing, and mingling with friends old and new.

Proceeds from both events supported our mission of “neighbors helping neighbors”.

Through our food pantries, backpack program, energy assistance program, and clothing and housewares pantries, the support of our community events gives local individuals and families a compassionate “hand up” to help them get back on their feet.



Gifts of Love is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Our tax identification number is 06-1309318.

#### **MAKING YOUR DOLLARS WORK FOR STRUGGLING NEIGHBORS**

Our donors' generous financial contributions make it possible for us to provide food, clothing, housewares, toiletries and other basic needs to local individuals and families who are struggling to make ends meet.

The following charts show our donation revenue and expenditures for fiscal year 2023.

We simply could not accomplish our strategic mission without the generous support of businesses, organizations, foundations and individuals who recognize the importance of basic needs assistance for greater Hartford's most vulnerable citizens.

# 2023

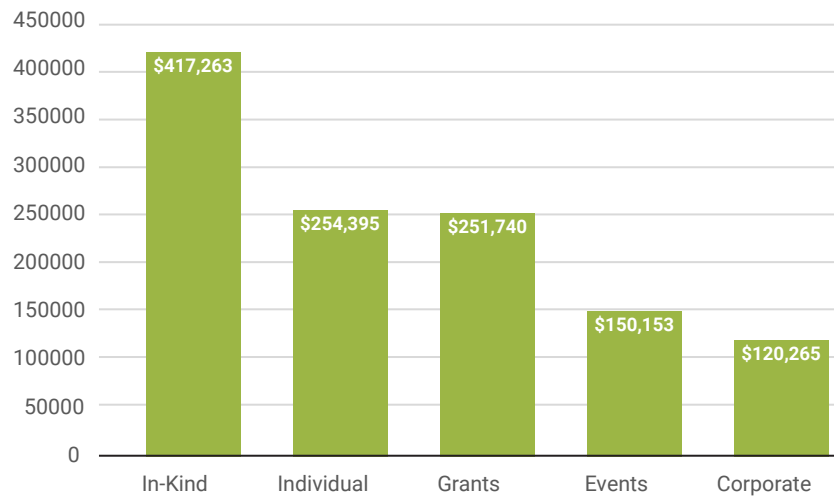
## FINANCIAL REPORT

### 2023 TOTAL REVENUE

**\$1,193,816**

#### Revenue

In-Kind:	\$417,263
Individual:	\$254,395
Grants:	\$251,740
Events:	\$150,153
Corporate:	\$120,265

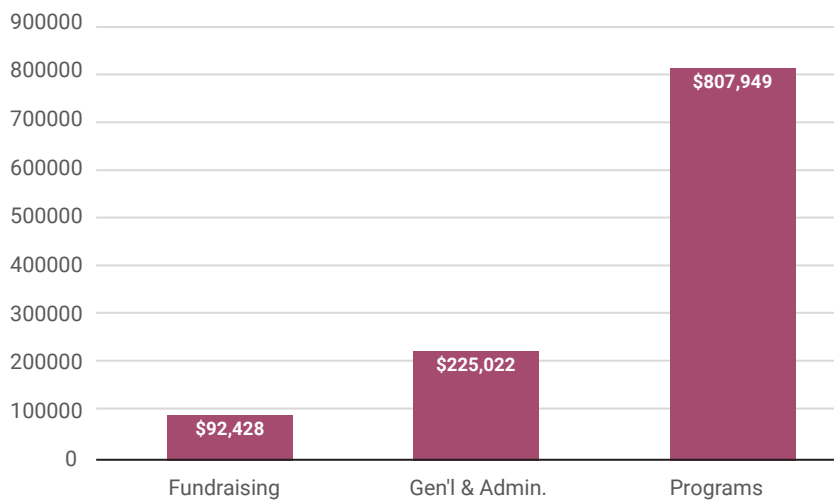


### 2023 TOTAL EXPENSES

**\$1,125,399**

#### Expenses

Fundraising:	\$92,428
Gen'l & Admin:	\$225,022
Programs:	\$807,949





**LISA GRAY**  
**Executive Director**

Prior to leading the team at Gifts of Love, Lisa was the Founder and Executive Director of A Promise to Jordan, a nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness of substance use disorders established in honor of her son. She also served as Executive Director of the Simsbury Chamber of Commerce and held roles at the Simsbury Police Department and UCONN Health Center.



**NANCY CARLSON**  
**Volunteer and Outreach Manager**

In addition to her Volunteer and Community Outreach responsibilities, Nancy facilitates all special events and manages the Weekend Backpack program. Nancy has been with Gifts of Love for over 13 years after a career in High-Risk Underwriting and as a Special Education teacher.



**VAL LAUZON**  
**Client Administrator**

Val manages all client activities at Gifts of Love. Prior to joining the team in 2021, she was a long-time volunteer. In addition to serving the clients, she organizes and oversees the Holiday Shoppe. Prior to moving to Avon, Val worked as a copy editor in Boston.



**MICHAEL OLIVIERI**  
**Food Programs Manager**

Michael manages Gifts of Love's food pantries in Avon and Hartford. Additionally, he identifies and coordinates food distributions to other non-profit pantries across Greater Hartford. Michael has over 30 years of experience as an independent business owner.



**KIYANA RIDDICK**  
**Hartford Office Manager**

Kiyana manages operations at our Hartford location. Prior to joining the team at Gifts of Love, Kiyana worked in customer service at both Allstate and The Hartford. During the summer of 2021, she interned at Gifts of Love while completing her bachelor's degree in human services.



**BIANA CLARK**  
**Donor Administrator**

Biana assists with fundraising activities, donor relations, and communications at Gifts of Love. She has over 20 years of experience in television production.

# 2023 GIFTS OF LOVE STAFF

## Meet the Team That Makes the Magic Happen.

Gifts of Love delivers life-changing services to the individuals and families we serve because of our incredible staff. Their tremendous efforts and contributions behind the scenes aren't often recognized or celebrated, but we couldn't do the work we do without them.



**INGRID KANJA, MPH, MAT**  
Volunteer Manager

Ingrid began as a volunteer for Gifts of Love in 2013 to give back to her local community. When offered the role of Teen Volunteer Program Coordinator, she eagerly accepted and has been guiding teen volunteers since 2017. She has a Master's in Public Health and a Master's in Teaching and is currently a teacher in a local school.



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# 2023 GIFTS OF LOVE BOARD MEMBERS

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**ROBERT WONG, PRESIDENT**  
**SEAN RILEY, TREASURER**  
**LYDIA TEDONE, SECRETARY**  
**CHERYL CHESTER**  
**JAIME HEGARTY**  
**JOAN KEMLER**  
**NESTOR LEON**  
**VAUGHN ROBBINS**

*Our deepest gratitude goes out to former Board member, Curtis Williams, who retired from service in 2023.*



**ROBERT WONG**  
**President**

Robert and his family have been active volunteers at Gifts of Love for the Weekend Backpack Program and at the main office in Avon. Robert is an executive at GE Capital.



**JAIME HEGARTY**  
**Board Member**

Jaime Hegarty has a background in the financial services and insurance industries with expertise in project management and building strategy to support change. After volunteering with Gifts of Love over the years, she has welcomed the transition to Board of Directors.



**SEAN RILEY**

**Treasurer**

Sean has extensive business experience across corporate, consulting, and not-for-profit settings and is currently Vice President of Client Delivery & Practice Management for Kelley Management Consulting, Inc.



**LYDIA TEDONE**

**Secretary**

Lydia is a long-term Board member at Gifts of Love. She is a member of the Simsbury Board of Education and Chair of the CREC Council.



**CHERYL CHESTER**

**Board Member**

Cheryl has developed her more than 25-year career as a human resource professional, focused in the areas of leadership and organizational development.



**JOAN KEMLER**

**Board Member**

Joan became involved with Gifts of Love 20 years ago as a volunteer and board member. She especially enjoyed planning successful fundraising events for the organization. After her retirement as a nurse practitioner in Geriatric Psychiatry, she returned to Gifts of Love as a volunteer and board member.”



**NESTOR LEON**

**Board Member**

Nestor has extensive experience as a leader in Project Management and Operations in the non-profit and public education sectors. He is currently a Project Director for Connecticut State Colleges and Universities.



**VAUGHN ROBBINS**

**Board Member**

Vaughn has a strong background in leading the development of new products and marketing strategies in both US and International markets. He is excited by the opportunity to bring his experience to Gifts of Love and to help impact the community at large.

# Volunteers

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## OUR VOLUNTEERS

The more than 200 volunteers who give over 14,000 hours annually of their time in support of our mission perform a large range of jobs, including clerical work, client interaction, donation sorting, and food pantry tasks.

The VolunTEEN program gives local teens the opportunity to get involved and complete service hours often required by their schools. They volunteer evenings and weekends as their schedules allow.

*“The staff and volunteers provide more than just the ‘nuts and bolts’. They create an atmosphere of warmth and welcoming in hopes of making a difference in the clients’ daily lives. Plus they make being there fun!” – M.L.*



***“It’s a place focused on helping people, and I’m honored to have been a part of it. I’m thankful for my time here and encourage anyone thinking of volunteering to come in and try it.” – R.L.***

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Sweta Agrawal	Shaddad Hayajneh	Max Mutarelli	Lisa Stevenson
Cathy Arciero	Cassidy Hazel	Paul Nyklicek	Luz Valencia
Grace Asmar	Kathryn Hegarty	Jennifer O’Dea	Betsy Van Loon
Cole Barnhart	Olivia Heslin	Martha O’Leary	Randi VanSack
Lana Bell	Quinn Higgins	Allison Olivieri	Joanne Verde
Amy Borg	Alisha Hussain	Dianne Orenstein	Jessica Vicente
Diane Boyce	Diane Ibanez	Christine Oswick	Laura Vickery
Marcy Boyd	Rodolfo Ibanez	Elizabeth Ouellette	David Wadhams
MaryEllen Bradley	Roland Ivan	Katherine Overbye	Ashley Wasilonsky
Susan Bradley	Mary Joerg	Rebecca Pardoe	Judith Weingarden
Nancy Breznicky	Debra Johnson	Giana Park	Katelyn Westerberg
Terri Buganski	Linda Johnston	Ayan Patney	Erin White
Amy Buonocore	Joan Kemler	Flora Pretashi	Ruth Woodford
Kerry Caffrey	Patrick Knorr	Beth Prevo	Susan Wurz
Kathleen Chambers	Patricia Kovaleski	Donna Pritchard	Timothy Wynne
Sally Chen	Elke Kulas	Carolyn Raymond	Debra York
Julia Christolini	Margery Lawrence	Olivia Reynolds	
Kathryn Christolini	Jenessa Licki	Joseph Russo	
Jessica Clancy	Bridget Lincoln	Paula Ryan	
Sadie Clancy	Allie Loveless	Sarah Schlegel	
Steve Clancy	Kathleen Maglia	Toni Schnur	
Sullivan Clancy	Janice Malyak	Isabella Schwarz	
James Crawford	Betty Martin	Sierra Scott	
Seth Dayton	Julia McCamish	Kathleen Service	
Lauren Denges	Deborah Micheller	Connor Shaw	
Pierce Doran	Greg Midwinter	Nathan Shaw	
Martins Enxuto	Linda Midwinter	Ava Shiman	
Megan Gallant	Simon Miller	Carol Sicilian	
Donna Gianini	Kristin Minnich	Ashlyn Sklenka	
Lisa Giarratana	Telma Molina	Betsy Smith	
Justin Grant	Antonette Molson	Cara Smith	
Sara Griffin	Parker Moody	Mercer Smith	
Amy Grossberg	Gregory Moreno	Trina Stehlik	
Ryan Grzyb		Finola Stenson	

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# WAYS TO SUPPORT GIFTS OF LOVE

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**By making a donation, you will have the opportunity to see your generosity in action and may receive a federal income tax charitable deduction when you itemize.**



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# Here's how:

- **Donate online**  
Visit us at [GiftsofLoveCT.org](http://GiftsofLoveCT.org) and click on “Donate Now”
- **Donate by phone**  
Give us a call at (860) 676-2323
- **Donate by mail**  
Mail a check to Gifts of Love, 34 East Main Street, Avon, CT 06001
- **Ask your employer to match your gift**  
Many employers match dollar-for-dollar the charitable gifts their employees make – some will double- or even triple-match an employee’s donation, which is a great way to maximize your ability to contribute to Gifts of Love.
- **Payroll deductions**  
Many companies offer an employee giving program in their workplace.
- **Donor Advised Funds (DAF)**  
A donor-advised fund is a type of charitable savings account. When you fund the account, you receive an immediate tax deduction, and then recommend grants to an eligible charity, such as Gifts of Love.
- **Brokerage and investment accounts**  
When you donate appreciated securities or mutual funds that you have held for more than one year to an eligible charity, you can reduce or even eliminate federal capital gains taxes on the transfer.
- **Retirement accounts**  
Once you reach age 70½, you can donate to Gifts of Love from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA) any amount up to a maximum of \$100,000 per year.
- **Leave a bequest**  
By naming Gifts of Love in your will, you’ll be able to perpetuate the values you’ve expressed during your lifetime and ensure that Gifts of Love is able to serve many generations to come.

*Gifts of Love offers this information to provide general gift, estate and financial planning information. It is not intended as legal, accounting, tax or other advice. For assistance in planning charitable gifts, the services of appropriate advisors should be consulted to determine tax and legal implications. Always consult an attorney if your plans require the revision of a will or other legal document.*

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**GIFTS OF LOVE - AVON**

34 East Main Street, Avon, CT 06001

*Phone: 860-676-2323*

*Fax: 860-676-9864*

**GIFTS OF LOVE - HARTFORD**

571 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105

*Phone: 860-206-0045*

*Please call for office hours.*

*We are also open for client services by appointment.*

*Donations of food, clothing, and basic need items are accepted during regular business hours.*

**[info@giftsoflovet.org](mailto:info@giftsoflovet.org)**

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**Gifts of Love**

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