



Six women spend two weeks in Berea for first residential session since before pandemic

NOSW was thrilled to once again host a residential session this summer—the first since before the pandemic.

Six women from four Kentucky counties arrived in Berea on Saturday, June 18, for two weeks of intense self-development work.

Just getting here was a challenge, as the women left their homes, families, jobs and other obligations to spend 14 very full days together.

They explored self-esteem, professional skills, Appalachian literature and culture, expressive arts, personality styles, meditation and more. In the process, they clarified the changes they want to see in their lives and set goals to achieve them.

When they graduated on July 2, each gave a short speech about her journey.

"I hope to take with me the strength that I have found in myself while being here, and the friendships," said Brandie Lunsford (second from left in photo). "It takes a lot for women to show up and be vulnerable."

Jessica Swafford (far right) likened her experience to



See page 3 for more photos of our residential session.

a blossoming plant. "I am full of shoots, and I am going to be a spider plant that grows out in every direction."

Gina Meyer (second from right) said: "I learned in these classes that I am and have always been everything I ever needed to be, nothing less, nothing more, just perfect the way I am." 🌸

The Sisterhood

Edna Igo has committed her life to helping kids find community and stay on track

Edna Igo feels that if her work makes a difference for at least one child, it will all have been worth it.

Edna and her husband, Emmitt, opened Igo's Boxing and Fitness Center in Richmond in 2010. Emmitt had been a boxer and coach, and their son, Carlos, was a youth boxer who competed in the Olympic trials.

The Igos started the gym to give local kids something constructive to do in their free time. They teach boxing and fitness, but also help the kids set goals and keep their grades up. When a kid can't afford the gym fees, they provide scholarships. Sometimes kids come back years later as adults to visit and tell Edna and Emmitt how much the



Edna Igo

experience meant to them.

"If one child benefits from it, it was worth it. And it has been," Edna says.

Edna's sister, Sarah Moran, was a 1997 graduate of the New

Opportunity School for Women. Edna came to NOSW in 2000, after Emmitt had been diagnosed with cancer in 1999.

"It was just really for moral support, to help me stay in the right frame of mind as far as dealing with the issues of that," she says.

Her son was also going through some troubles at the time, and her mother had been sick. Being with other women who were experiencing similar challenges was helpful to Edna. "It was a group of us that had been through a lot," she says.

The residential program taught her that "you don't always have to

See Edna on page 3.

From the Executive Director

While the hallways are quiet once again, it was so good to have them full for a couple of weeks. We are still catching our breath from what proved to be an amazing, exciting, challenging residential program. While precautions were taken, COVID managed to creep into our summer session, but as experienced dancers can continue to flow even when there is a misstep, so too the NOSW team and participants. We now know how to pivot in cases like this, and we also have the best NOSW Door Dash team around!

Our six women all rolled with the changes with such openness and gratitude that they made it easy on us. So, while we had a 50% positive rate among participants and session staff, we have all come through with flying colors. Our new "sisters" are truly examples of resilience.

In a recent presentation on a

topic not related to NOSW, my co-facilitator and I used a prayer called "Teach me to listen," by John Veltri, SJ. As I read it to the group, I could not help but see the connection to the work we do at the New Opportunity School for Women.

"Teach me to listen . . . Help me to be aware that no matter what words I hear, the message is, 'Accept the person I am. Listen to me.' . . . Help me to be less afraid to trust the voice inside—in the deepest part of me."

It is in this deep listening to the inner voice, which we at NOSW refer to as the inner pilot light, that real, sustained transformation can take place. Despite all the noise, negativity, self-doubt and obstacles, our inner pilot light can lead us forward, and with each step we grow in confidence, in awareness of what is possible and in hope. This is the transformation our participants ex-

perience at NOSW. It is nurtured by the community that they developed as a cohort, but also by the larger group we fondly call the NOSW Sisterhood. It is also nurtured by all of you who believe in this work through your financial, in-kind and volunteer support of our programs. We are profoundly grateful!

For over 35 years NOSW has provided opportunities for transformation, and we hope to be a conduit for transformation far into the future. Because of NOSW's ability to pivot to new formats, particularly given the challenging landscape that COVID presented for the past two and a half years, today we have become a more viable and sustain-

able organization. In every respect we are resilient!



Debbie Benterof

Updates

35th anniversary panel

In honor of NOSW's 35th anniversary, founder Jane Stephenson gathered with four graduates on May 9 on Zoom to reflect on the history and impacts of the program.

Pictured clockwise from top are Jane Stephenson, Sandi Keaton-Wilson (1995), Jennifer West (2019), Anita DuBose (1993) and Jennifer Walden (2015).



DEI next steps

In late May, NOSW staff traveled to the Red River Gorge to plan next steps around diversity, equity and inclusion.

Staff and five NOSW graduates had recently completed an eight-part training that provided a foundation for understanding white supremacy culture and its impacts on people of color and other marginalized groups.

At the retreat in May, staff arrived at three goals for moving this work forward: 1) continue our DEI education and increasingly build DEI into our programming, 2) develop organizational policy around DEI and 3) update and expand how we communicate to the world about our DEI commitment.

Festival of Trees

NOSW is excited to host our first Festival of Trees since before the pandemic on November 4-5 at Churchill's in Berea. We'll have trees for auction, local crafters, music and more. Contact Amy Hogg at ahogg@nosw.org for info about sponsorships or volunteering.



Sister Voices

Transformation Takes Its Time

Transformation takes its time.
It moves slowly like water
Trickling over rough rocks.
Given enough time,
Those rocks will become smooth
stones
The water, a raging river.

Transformation has its own pace.
It drums like rain drops
Beating a rhythm on a tin roof.
If enough rain drops gather,
An ocean forms,
A continent shifts.

Transformation holds on
Like a sapling in a hurricane.
It clings to its foundation.
If it holds on long enough,
If it bends without breaking,
New life will take root.

Transformation runs wildly
Like a small child through sprinklers.
If the sun shines just right-
A rainbow will dance,
Joy will be abundant,
Childhood made eternal.

Like the trickle of water over rocks
Like the rain on the roof top
Like the tree surviving the hurricane
Like the child running through
sprinklers
Transformation moves within you.

Your rough edges
Are made smooth
Your attitude shifts
You become rooted
Your joy is abundant
You are changed
-Made greater

—Jessica Swafford
NOSW Graduate, 2008 and 2022



Edna Igo focuses on helping kids get a good start in life

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be a yes person for everybody." She learned that it's important—not selfish—to take time for yourself. And she was inspired by all that the women accomplished while they were together.

After NOSW, Edna and her family learned more about cancer and met other families dealing with it, which helped prepare them for Carlos's

cancer diagnosis in 2009. Both Emmitt and Carlos survived cancer and are leading full lives today.

Edna and Emmitt are active in their Madison County community, partnering with other organizations to serve kids and families. They also help out with their grandchildren.

"We have been truly blessed, and we just want to bless others," Edna says. 🌸



35 years

NEW OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL FOR WOMEN

204 Chestnut Street
Berea, Kentucky 40403

The New Opportunity School for Women

serves under-resourced Appalachian women who are ready to build stable and fulfilling lives for themselves, their families and their communities. All of our programs are free.

Supporters

After retiring from ECU, Anne Blakeney wanted to get more involved with NOSW

Anne Blakeney first learned of the New Opportunity School for Women in the late 1980s. She says she was “awestruck” by the difference the program could make in a woman’s life.

Anne grew up in Morristown, Tennessee. Her early career took her to Louisiana and then North Carolina. After she came to Eastern Kentucky University in 1984 to teach occupational therapy, she began attending events at Berea College



Anne Blakeney

and reconnecting with her Appalachian heritage.

She heard about Jane Stephenson and the program she had started for Appalachian women. “It seemed that with such a few small efforts—when you consider the whole scheme of challenges women face—it could make a huge difference and change somebody’s whole life,” Anne says.

When she designed a class on providing health services in Eastern Kentucky, focused on the structures that lead to poverty and a lack of services, Anne invited Jane to speak about

the challenges under-resourced women in the mountains face.

Anne continued to follow the work of NOSW and made donations over the years. When she retired from ECU after 27 years of teaching, she wanted to get more involved. She signed up as a monthly Sustainer in 2021. “I wanted to use my money to make a difference,” she says.

This spring Anne invited NOSW staff to speak at her Rotary Club, and now she’s working on a grant to help the school purchase computers. She hopes to get even more involved with NOSW as a volunteer. 🌸