**Summary of EOW Honorees December 2021-December 2023**

Q. 4 2021 Rebecca Lynn

Q. 1 2022 Candice Byrd

Q. 2 2022 Rosemary Parker

Q. 3 2022 Alexis Kalish

Q. 4 2022 Dorothy Deany

Q. 1 2023 Jerri Andrew

Q. 2 2023 Kerri Johnson

Q. 2 2023 Linda Randle

Q. 4 2023 Verneice Prince

**Q. 4 2021 Rebecca Lynn**

From a fearful “rebel” facing 15-30 years in prison to an open, strong, and compassionate woman and counselor, Rebecca Lynn serves as a powerful inspiration to her community. She has defied the odds and leaped forward from each drawback. When no one else believed that she could, she did. While she has endured a plethora of obstacles in her life including abuse, abandonment, academic failure, rejections from employers, and even criminal charges, all that strife has transformed her into an incredibly resilient woman.

Rebecca's life took a significant turn at the age of 21 when she was accepted at Illinois State University, amidst facing trial for a Class X felony. Growing up in a large, religious family, Rebecca faced challenges, including an abusive relationship that led to her involvement in illegal activities.

Arrested for her son's father's possessions, she faced a year-long trial and uncertainty about her future. Ultimately, he was sentenced to 49 years in prison, while she received two years of probation. Determined to turn her life around, Rebecca faced an identity crisis during her first year at ISU, but with support, she overcame academic struggles and earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and psychology.

Rebecca's journey didn't end there; she delved into helping others by working at a homeless shelter, obtaining a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor credential, and earning a master’s degree in Mental Health Counseling. Despite struggling with confidence, she became an effective counselor, eventually starting her private practice, Blue Skies Counseling, in 2018.

Her dedication to helping others continued as she worked in local schools and grew her private practice. Overcoming challenges, including leaving a secure counseling job, Rebecca embraced the growth of Blue Skies Counseling, becoming an inspiration to her community. She emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships for healing.

Rebecca's strength comes from her faith and family. Recognized as the first ExtraOrdinary Woman by the ExtraOrdinary Women Project BN, she sees it as an opportunity to embrace her journey's growth and express gratitude for her purpose.

Rebecca Lynn's extraordinary story is not just about her past but the resilience and transformation she has forged from it, making her a beacon of inspiration. Her dream is to write a book to encourage others facing similar struggles. Congratulations to Rebecca Lynn, a true ExtraOrdinary Woman whose journey exemplifies perseverance, resilience, and the power of positive transformation.

Rebecca joined the EOW Board of Directors in 2022.

**Q. 1 2022 Candice Byrd**

Candice Byrd's journey from homelessness to becoming an advocate for change and a coordinator at the YWCA is a testament to her resilience and determination. Pregnant with her third child, Candice faced eviction and lived at Home Sweet Home Mission for six months. Despite doubts about her parenting abilities and struggles with depression, she found solace in the encouragement of staff and the connections she made with others at the shelter.

Candice's turning point came when she began helping fellow residents and organizing collection drives. Her intrinsic value came from assisting others, leading her to overcome her own challenges. Battling predatory lending, she later volunteered for Illinois People’s Action, advocating for systemic changes to the payday loan industry. Through public speaking and activism, Candice found empowerment and realized the impact of collective voices.

Born and raised in Bloomington-Normal, Candice faced rebellious phases and a traumatic experience at 14, leading to juvenile detention and probation. Despite challenges, she pursued her interest in psychology at Heartland Community College. Her journey involved setbacks, including a brief period of homelessness, but Candice eventually earned a degree in Business Management.

Working at the YWCA, Candice co-created the STRIVE program, empowering women to secure living-wage employment. She overcame self-doubt and found fulfillment in helping others transform their lives. Her advocacy extends to addressing the school-to-prison pipeline, emphasizing reformative practices over punitive measures for young individuals.

Candice's personal growth, dedication to change, and impact on the lives of others make her an ExtraOrdinary Woman. Despite facing turbulence, she has soared above challenges and become an inspiration for resilience and empathy. Candice's story reflects her commitment to making a positive difference in the community, showcasing the transformative power of perseverance and compassion.

Today, Candice works at the YWCA helping others.

**Q. 2 2022 Rosemary Parker**

Rosemary Parker, named the second-quarter ExtraOrdinary Woman of 2022 by the ExtraOrdinary Women Project BN, has dedicated her life to shaping and benefiting the community. Raised with values of honesty, integrity, hard work, and helping others, Rosemary's journey has been influenced by her parents' teachings.

Starting from her childhood, Rosemary actively participated in her father's grocery store, learning the importance of giving back to those in need. Her mother's patience, faith, and integrity further shaped her character. Graduating from Lincoln Community High School in 1960, Rosemary pursued elementary education at Illinois State University, marrying James "Jim" Parker in 1964.

Balancing her role as a parent and educator, Rosemary taught kindergarten and later served as the Title I Director, impacting students' lives positively. Her ability to inspire "light bulb" moments in children, fostering confidence and growth, has left a lasting impression. Former students have even become teachers themselves, inspired by Rosemary's dedication.

Amidst personal challenges, including caring for her aging parents and dealing with health issues, Rosemary discovered resilience and strength within herself. Currently, at the age of 79, she continues to contribute to the community's well-being. As the president of Living Well United Senior Center, Rosemary organizes resources, education, and activities for seniors and at-risk populations.

Her involvement extends to various boards and initiatives, such as Mercy Ministries, J. T. Crumbaugh Library Board of Trustees, and the Empire Township Historical Museum. Rosemary's leadership in projects like the healthy recipe book and The Support Squad reflects her commitment to addressing community needs.

A testament to her selfless efforts is the initiative with Faith in Action, assisting small community residents in need of transportation for medical appointments. Rosemary's new project, The Support Squad, aims to offer a respite for caregivers of Alzheimer's or dementia patients, inspired by her own experiences.

Known for her quiet yet impactful work, Rosemary's dedication to the greater good has positively influenced countless individuals. Her ability to organize resources and create meaningful connections reflects her tenacity and commitment to community well-being. Congratulations to Rosemary Parker on being recognized as the ExtraOrdinary Woman of the quarter, a true inspiration to the community.

**Q. 3 2022 Alexis Kalish**

Alexis Kalish has been named the third-quarter ExtraOrdinary Woman of 2022 by The ExtraOrdinary Women Project BN, recognizing her exceptional contributions, steadfastness, strength, and integrity to the community. A resident of Bloomington, Alexis has dedicated her life to uplifting others, a passion that continued even during her own challenging health journey.

Two years ago, Alexis faced a life-changing diagnosis of an incurable blood cancer, Multiple Myeloma. Despite undergoing an arduous treatment program, including radiation, chemotherapy, and a stem cell transplant, Alexis maintained her faith, supported by her husband, Mike, and her network of family and friends.

Before her diagnosis, Alexis had volunteered for 35 years with The STAR Literacy Program, helping adult learners enhance their reading, writing, and math skills. She also volunteered with Chestnut Health Systems, the Regional Alternative Schools, The American Business Women’s Association, The Immigration Project (TIP), and the Heartland Community College Area Planning Council. Her involvement ranged from supporting literacy projects to working on naturalization applications and contributing to women's education.

As a patron of the arts, Alexis served two six-year terms on the Board of Directors for the McLean County Arts Center, receiving the Douglas C. Johnson Distinguished Patron Award in 2020. Despite health challenges, she continues to support the Arts Center by volunteering on the Events Committee. Alexis also contributes to the Women to Women Giving Circle.

At 73, Alexis's journey began on a small farm near Springfield, Illinois, instilling values of patience, strong work ethic, and the importance of family. She attended Illinois State University, majoring in special education, and later worked at State Farm for 34 years, retiring as the director in the Health Risk Management Department. Alexis met her husband, Mike, at State Farm, and their enduring relationship has spanned 31 years.

Throughout her life, Alexis has exemplified a commitment to community service, dedication, and determination. Despite her health challenges, she continues to volunteer, educate herself about her disease, and walk long distances with her husband. Alexis measures her success by the impact she has had on others, remaining a source of inspiration and light. Nominator Kimberly Babin describes Alexis as the definition of an "ExtraOrdinary Woman," facing challenges with resilience and lifting others up.

Congratulations to Alexis Kalish for being recognized as this quarter’s ExtraOrdinary Woman. Her contributions to the community, coupled with her unwavering spirit, make her a beacon of inspiration and gratitude for all she does.

**Q. 4 2022 Dorothy Deany**

Dorothy Deany has been honored as the fourth-quarter ExtraOrdinary Woman of 2022 by The ExtraOrdinary Women Project BN, recognizing her exceptional dedication, heart, and fearlessness in serving the community. A true volunteer, Dorothy's tireless efforts at St. Vincent de Paul-Holy Trinity (SVDP), local schools, and area service gardens have made a significant impact.

Growing up as the oldest of seven siblings on a Chatsworth farm, Dorothy learned the values of hard work and responsibility early in life. Engaging in 4H throughout junior high and high school, she honed her sense of volunteerism and responsibility. Dorothy's commitment to community service, instilled by her parents, extends to her own family, with her husband Bernie and children actively participating in volunteer work.

Dorothy's journey with SVDP began in 2008 when she helped establish the St. Isidore’s Garden, a produce garden at the old Central Catholic High School. Over the years, the garden has expanded, providing thousands of pounds of fresh produce to those in need. Dorothy's family farm in Chatsworth also contributes winter squash to the pantry.

In 2015, Dorothy joined SVDP as a volunteer, answering phones and later contributing to the customer-choice food pantry and clothing pantry. Her role involves client information management, organizing food deliveries, and providing creative recipes for food products. Dorothy became the vice president of SVDP-Holy Trinity in 2017, dedicating six days a week to its operations.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Dorothy and fellow volunteers at SVDP adapted their operations to ensure the community's needs were met. Despite facing challenges, they continued to serve, with Dorothy appreciating the support of dedicated volunteers.

Dorothy's life journey includes diverse experiences, from teaching junior high math to running a childcare center with her husband. She worked as a florist, engaged in politics, and served as a legislative analyst for the Department of Transportation. Dorothy's wisdom extends to advice for younger generations, emphasizing the reciprocal benefits of volunteering.

Congratulations to Dorothy Deany for being recognized as the ExtraOrdinary Woman for the fourth quarter of 2022. Her relentless acts of service and love continue to make a positive impact on the community, inspiring others to follow her example.

**Q. 1 2023 Jerri Andrew**

Jerri's life has been a journey of resilience, strength, and self-reliance. Born in Missouri, she faced early challenges with an alcoholic stepdad and her mother's illness, which led to her and her sister being placed in foster care after her mother's death. Adopted at 10, Jerri struggled in her adoptive home, feeling misunderstood despite her efforts to excel in academics and household responsibilities.

Determined to be independent, Jerri left home at 17, supporting herself while completing high school. In the 80s, she faced single motherhood, managing a household with three children, one of whom was hearing impaired. Despite financial constraints, Jerri graduated from Illinois State University in 2000 with a degree in social work.

Jerri's commitment to community service became evident in her role at the Chamber of Commerce, developing programs to empower low-resource populations. Her resilience and dedication led her to join the Navy Reserves at 17, initially seeking financial support but eventually serving for 23 years.

Deployed to Iraq and various military assignments, Jerri faced challenges but emerged stronger. Her leadership skills flourished, earning her the rank of Chief Petty Officer. She emphasizes the importance of mentorship, acknowledging those who guided her.

Returning home posed challenges as she adjusted to civilian life, but Jerri found purpose in her role as Community Service Block Grant Coordinator at Mid Central Community Action. Her passion for collaborative efforts to uplift individuals and communities became evident through her initiatives.

Jerri's journey includes overcoming personal obstacles, such as her son's murder, teaching her the power of forgiveness and love. Despite life's adversities, she remains an advocate for selfless service, continuous learning, and mentoring.

Named an ExtraOrdinary Woman, Jerri credits her mentors and encourages recognizing the extraordinary in every individual. Her advice to the younger generation is to make a plan, emphasizing the importance of perseverance.

Jerri's story reflects a life dedicated to service, learning, and inspiring others to recognize their inner light. In her words, everyone is extraordinary, and encouraging others to let their light shine brighter can make the world a brighter place for all.

**Q. 2 2023 Kerri Johnson**

Officer Kerri Johnson, a Bloomington Police Officer, was recently recognized by the ExtraOrdinary Women Project for her impactful contributions to the community. Johnson, a Black female officer, attended a community event where her presence resonated deeply with a woman, highlighting the positive impact of diversity within the police force.

As a single mother of two, balancing a challenging career on the night shift with raising her children, Johnson is a role model for her kids and a pillar of support in the community. Born and raised in Bloomington, she experienced a typical childhood, excelling in sports, particularly basketball.

After high school, Johnson joined the National Guard, where she learned discipline and gained self-confidence. Despite facing an unexpected ACL injury during her sophomore year in college, she pivoted to focus on her studies. Initially torn between nursing and law enforcement, she chose the latter after realizing her passion for helping others in a different capacity.

Kerri attended the Macon County Law Enforcement Training Center and later became a Bloomington Police Officer. Recognized for her exemplary performance, Johnson received multiple awards, including the Bloomington Police Department Exemplary Performance Awards and a Letter of Commendation.

In her current role as a field training officer, Johnson guides new officers through their initial phases, emphasizing the practical application of knowledge acquired in the Police Academy. Chief Jamal Simington commends her sacrifices, predicting her future leadership within the department.

Notably, Johnson actively contributes to achieving the Bloomington Police Department's 30x30 recruitment goals, striving for a 30 percent female representation by 2030. She emphasizes the importance of diversity in law enforcement and aims to bridge historical divides. Johnson believes in creating an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable and welcomed.

Her commitment extends beyond local efforts, recognizing the national significance of advancing women in policing. Despite her humility, Johnson embodies the qualities of an extraordinary woman – selfless, fearless, and resilient. She positively impacts others and strives to be a better person for herself and those around her.

As Officer Johnson modestly acknowledges her extraordinary journey, her story reflects dedication, perseverance, and a profound commitment to positive change in her community and the field of law enforcement.

Top of Form

**Q. 2 2023 Linda Randle**

Linda Randle, a Bloomington resident, has been honored as this quarter's ExtraOrdinary Woman for her exceptional bravery and dedication to helping others through sharing, listening, and empowering women. Linda defines an ExtraOrdinary Woman as every woman, emphasizing that each person is uniquely created in the image of God, making them extraordinary despite negative experiences that contribute to their individuality.

Linda's journey began in central Illinois, moving to Bloomington in 1993 to attend Illinois State University, majoring in Public Relations. Her passion for speaking and writing emerged during her undergraduate years. Later, she pursued a master's degree in Spiritual Formation at Lincoln Christian University, focusing on spiritual transformation through silence, solitude, and prayer.

Currently employed as a Senior Billing Specialist at a local insurance company, Linda reflects on her spiritual journey, highlighting her introverted nature and the significance of alone time in connecting with God. Despite being initially drawn to Bloomington-Normal for job opportunities as a single mother, Linda's deeper spiritual journey unfolded, leading her to faith in 1998 during a challenging period.

Encountering Christ in a church, Linda's life took a transformative turn. She became involved in women's ministry, feeling a calling to support women facing mental, physical, or sexual abuse. Drawing from her own experiences, Linda shared her story, providing a safe space for others to open up about their pain and find healing.

Linda's involvement with Women Standing on The Word Ministry and the Jesus House Women's Ministry showcased her commitment to helping women overcome hardships. She wrote for newsletters, expressing her passion for writing, and contributed to the empowerment of women through various events and platforms.

Participating in the Women's Empowerment Event and "That's What She Said," Linda shared her story of forgiveness and healing, emphasizing the need for women to have a safe space to express their pain and find transformation. Her goal is to inspire and support other women, fostering a sense of community and vulnerability.

Linda's speaking engagements and leadership roles, despite her preference for a behind-the-scenes role, demonstrate her dedication to empowering women. She acknowledges the inspiration she draws from other women and aims to offer the same encouragement and support she received when she was struggling.

Ultimately, Linda Randle's journey exemplifies an ExtraOrdinary Woman, someone who transforms personal hardships into opportunities to heal and uplift others. Her commitment to creating a space for women to find strength, healing, and transformation reflects the essence of an extraordinary life dedicated to empowering others.

**Q. 4 2023 Verneice Prince**

Verneice Prince, recognized as an ExtraOrdinary Woman by the ExtraOrdinary Women Project BN, epitomizes resilience and determination, serving as an inspiring leader who overcame adversities to achieve extraordinary success. Verneice's unwavering belief in the transformative power of perseverance and positive external influences has shaped her journey.

Born into challenging circumstances, Verneice was placed in the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) care at the age of one. Growing up in foster care, often separated from her siblings, she faced traumatic experiences, including sexual abuse. However, her faith and religion instilled in her a profound belief that she could overcome these challenges and define her own path.

From a young age, Verneice aspired to become a social worker and serve as a positive role model. Emphasizing the importance of education, she recognized its value as a tool that no one could take away. Despite frequent moves within the foster care system, Verneice prioritized staying in school, eventually graduating from Chicago Vocational High School.

After aging out of the foster care system, Verneice joined the U.S. Army as a truck driver, viewing it as an opportunity to continue her education. Motivated by success in a business management class, she gained confidence in her academic abilities. During her military service, she met her first husband, and they had a son together.

Upon leaving the military, Verneice faced the challenges of being a single mother and worked various jobs to make ends meet. Her journey led her to Detroit, where she connected with her church community and sought stability for her son. Working in adult foster care, Verneice not only cared for her own children but also took in other children, embodying her commitment to helping others.

Verneice's pursuit of education continued through community colleges, leading to an associate's degree in general studies. Despite facing personal and marital challenges, including homelessness, Verneice persevered, earning a bachelor's degree in social work from Illinois State University after moving to Bloomington.

In 2020, Verneice achieved her dream of homeownership and obtained a master's degree in social work from ISU in just one year. Undeterred by advice against the accelerated program, she saw it as a challenge to overcome.

Currently working as a part-time counselor at INtegRIty Counseling, Verneice volunteers with community programs, including her nonprofit startup, Cruisin’ Outta Poverty Services (C.O.P.S.) Thrift Store in Normal. C.O.P.S. is more than a store; it serves as a homeless outreach program, providing emergency funds, transportation, housing assistance, and counseling.

Verneice's commitment to helping others is evident in her dedication to addressing poverty and homelessness through C.O.P.S. NFP Thrift. She founded the organization to offer an array of services, including counseling, entrepreneurship programs, and a mini-mart providing food to those in need. Verneice's vision is to empower individuals to overcome poverty and fulfill their potential.

Reflecting on her journey, Verneice acknowledges the angels on earth who have supported her. She firmly believes that everyone is capable of success and emphasizes the importance of providing encouragement and assistance to those who need it. Verneice has found her calling in helping others, demonstrated through her counseling work, community outreach, and the impactful services provided by C.O.P.S. Thrift. Her unwavering dedication to making a positive impact on the lives of others reflects a lifelong commitment to service and compassion.

**Complete stories can be found on the EOW website,** *https://www.theextraordinarywomenprojectbn.org/features*