

"SHARING SISTERS"

A Michigan State Chapter Executive Board Initiative

One of the blessings of P.E.O. Sisterhood is "Once a P.E.O., Always a P.E.O.". There may be seasons in our lives when fully participating in chapter life and giving our all to the Sisterhood might not be possible. These members remain active (dues are paid and status is active) but become non-participating members for a myriad of reasons. Some members simply cannot attend meetings, but still value membership and the philanthropy of our organization. Other members would be able to attend but for certain challenges they face. There are things chapters can do to help provide a sense of connection and belonging or to make attendance possible for the non-participatory members.

Women become non-participatory for many reasons. Here are some of the most common:

- Older women who have difficulties;
- Working women who can't make it to meetings;
- Young women with children at home;
- Women with conflicting work schedules;
- Women who are away from the community for extended times.

Some examples of typical roadblocks and suggestions for accommodating these situations:

- Driving difficulties (nighttime, not driving)—Offer to drive members to meetings or events.
- Childcare availability or cost—Provide childcare onsite or assist in paying for childcare.
- Meeting day/time doesn't work—Plan some meetings and social activities at alternate times
- Poor meeting management or programming issues—Poorly run or long meetings do not entice attendance. Make attending worth the time.
- Lack of connection and feelings of belonging:
 - Provide updates and information that keeps everyone in the loop of Chapter life.
 - Use nametags at all events.
 - Create biographies for each member that can be shared within chapter.

The State Board encourages each Michigan chapter to establish "Sharing Sisters" to help enrich each member's P.E.O. experience. The chapter will identify "non-participating" members and match them with a sister who is active in the life and work of the chapter. This is a mutual support system to help all members feel connected and be able to participate in their best way possible.

How to match special sisters:

- Identify the age, interests, hobbies of the non-participating members. Ask an active sister with similarities to be their Sharing Sister for the year.
- Chapter President will contact the non-participating sister(s) to explain new program
- Have a chapter social to help introduce program and all members together.

Supporting your chapter's non-participating members requires effort from the chapter and from the Sharing Sister.

How can a Sharing Sister provide loving support? Sharing Sisters could (ideas to consider, add your own):

- Keep lines of communication open: Letters, emails, notes, calls.
- Pick up Sister to assist with transportation and be a bridge to active members
- Learn about your Sister and identify their skills, strengths, interests
Ask the non-participating sister to assist on specific activities or work within the chapter that uses their skills or talents or experience; that fit within their time constraints.
- Organize small groups of members (casual gatherings) so your non-participating members feel connected to chapter.
- Ask non-participating sisters to be a hostess/co-hostess at meetings that are viable.
- Ask non-participating sisters to provide a program if applicable.

We anticipate that all Michigan chapters will participate in this program. Many non-participating members become inactive because they no longer feel connected to a chapter and to the Sisterhood. By providing a warm and mutually supportive connection with these members, we can prevent them becoming inactive. The chapter benefits, the member benefits, our state benefits.

Please let Karen Kline, Michigan State President, know if your chapter is participating in the new "Sharing Sister" program and keep her updated during the year on how things are going.