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PROFILE:



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Sandy Ross: A Lifetime of Philanthropy

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It all started when her daughter came home from school one day asking to be an “assisten.” Curious about what that even meant, Sandy Ross asked what she had to do in order to make that happen. Her daughter’s response was short and sweet, “You need to join Assistance League.” At that moment, Sandy had no idea the impact Assistance League would have on her and the impact she would have on it. After 25 years in the organization, Sandy currently sits as the National President overseeing 120 chapters and 22,000 members across the country.

A Philanthropy that has Stood the Test of Time

Assistance League is a national nonprofit organization that was founded by two women in 1919. What started with the formation of one singular chapter, Assistance League of Southern California, has grown exponentially over the years with chapters across the nation. Today, mothers and daughters can participate in these philanthropic efforts together. This is exactly what Sandy and her daughter did.

Although each chapter has different programs specialized for the needs of their community, Assistance League majorly focuses on supporting and uplifting children through various programs that provide them with school clothing, shoes, personal care items, school supplies, and, even in some chapters, dental services. In the past year, Assistance League was able to provide 331,000 children with clothing and school supplies, setting them up for success, especially during such a turbulent time in a global pandemic.



Image courtesy of [assistanceleague.org](https://www.assistanceleague.org)

Where It All Began

From a young age, Sandy always knew that she wanted to help others. Looking back on her life, a core memory sticks out to her when she was merely four years old. Even at that age she remembers the trauma and hardship her neighbors went through as they experienced a family's worst nightmare. Her neighbors watched as their family home, engulfed in flames, began to burn down. "They didn't have a lot of money so they continued to live in the house," Sandy recounts. Her neighbors also had a daughter that was similar to Sandy in age who she would play with. One day following the devastating fire, Sandy brought her over to her house. Sandy's mom found them in the bathroom and what she saw warmed her heart. There she was, four year old Sandy, hairbrush in hand combing through the little girl's hair. Sandy's hands scooped up water from the tub, gently rubbing the little girl's hands to remove the black soot she had on her. From the floor of her childhood bathroom, the desire to help those in need was instilled in her and has grown to be a crucial part of who she is as a person.

"I always had this notion that I wanted to help people"

When most highschoolers are thinking about Friday night football games, little crushes and sneaking out, Sandy's mind was oceans away. Sandy was ready to dedicate her life to helping others, and on a global level. With a little research, she found her answer-the Peace Corps. However, life and her parents had a different plan for her. Sandy's parents, like most, were extremely reluctant to let their baby travel far and wide for long periods of time. With a little convincing, Sandy put that major life decision on hold in order for her to attend college.



Image courtesy of Assistance League - Fresno

Funny how one small decision can change your life completely. If Sandy followed through with signing up for the Peace Corps, she would have never met the love of her life, future husband, and father of her two beautiful daughters. With the undeniable urge to help those in need, Sandy couldn't be more ecstatic that her daughter had the same inclination as her. Soon after their conversation, they formally joined their local chapter, Assistance League of Fresno.

Dream Dress

A lightbulb moment struck Sandy when spring cleaning came around. Flipping through dress after dress, the realization hit her: every single one had only been worn once. Whether for a formal, prom, or fancy event, the "perfect" dress every girl dreams of wearing gets shown off for a total of 3 hours before promptly returning back to the closet. For the amount of events her daughters went to, she could only imagine how many other girls in the community had the same tendency to wear a dress once before letting it collect dust and never to be worn again. This is how "Dream Dress" was born. The idea was simple: to collect dresses that would otherwise never see the light of day again and provide them to junior high and high school students who couldn't afford this privileged lifestyle. The pitch couldn't have gone over better with the Assistance League chapter. "Dream Dress" was adopted into their program and flourished, making it very apparent that this experience was not exclusive to the Ross family. Dresses on dresses overwhelmed the chapter and the only thing left they were able to do was expand the program. The Fresno chapter created its own dedicated space for over the 1,000 dresses they received from members.



Images courtesy of Assistance League - Fresno

Not everyone is privileged enough to be able to buy a new dress for every formal occasion. With one simple idea, Sandy and her Assistance League chapter was able to provide dresses, purses, high heels, and jewelry to local foster, homeless, and girls in need to have their "dream dress" and "dream" outfit for any event. It may sound silly, but every girl deserves to dress up and feel the most beautiful going to a school dance.

Leveling Up

Following the high school graduations of both her daughters, Sandy was steadfast in her membership to the Fresno chapter. That was until one chapter visit from Assistance League Nationals. Sitting on the board of her chapter, part of Sandy's role included taking part in the chapter visit. As she showcased all the good they did as a chapter, especially the introduction and success of "Dream Dress", it caught the attention of one of the national representatives. Following the visit, Sandy was pulled aside and asked a question she never even considered, "Have you ever thought about joining the national level as a committee member or board member?" To the national representative it was a no brainer; to Sandy it took her completely and utterly by surprise.

That one question led her down a rabbit hole as she imagined what it would be like to be a part of Assistance League at the national level. She decided to take a leap of faith and applied for a position as a committee member. To no surprise, except her own, she was chosen for the Corporate Marketing Committee due to her background in PR and journalism.



Image courtesy of Assistance League - Fresno



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Quickly climbing the ladder nationally, she served as the Director of Membership, Vice President of Chapter Services, National Parliamentarian, and Board Training Director. Finally reaching the top of the ladder, Sandy was nominated as President-Elect and began her Presidential journey in September of 2021.

Big Differences Bring Big Change

Over the years, Sandy has truly experienced all sides of Assistance League from a hands-on member experience to that of an administrative perspective. The difference between the chapter level and national level is a stark one, "We are looking at things from a 30,000-foot level, we are not down in the weeds in the operational aspect." There is love to be found in both roles. From a chapter member standpoint, you are able to actually see the recipients and experience that feel-good feeling that comes from meeting the people you are actively helping. You witness first hand the impact you have on the lives of others and how your actions are transforming their day, month, year, and life, just by helping them. From an administrative, national level, Sandy is a part of the change and evolution of Assistance League. As an organization that has truly stood the test of time, there were certainly parts of the organization that simply were not serving them well anymore. Sandy currently is spearheading the change by establishing relationships and partnerships with other nonprofit organizations as well as businesses across the country, which Assistance League has never seen or done before. Generation by generation, Assistance League has continued to grow and prosper. Sandy Ross is another empathetic, generous, and courageous women that makes Assistance League what it is today and what it will be tomorrow and for generations to come.

*"The most fulfilling part at the national level
has been being a part of the change."*

