

# Oh, What a Month!

BY DONNA F. ROBINSON, RN

**E**mloyers are constantly faced with the challenges of showing their staffs the appreciation they so rightly deserve. In this article, I would like to describe how our facility, Sacred Heart Manor, Philadelphia, demonstrated its core values and showed appreciation at the same time.

Sacred Heart Manor, sponsored by the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and the Infirm, is located in the historic Mount Airy section of Philadelphia. Its staff has been serving members of the community for 65 years.

Our mission statement reflects our determination to provide comfort; loving care; and support with respect, dignity, and compassion in a spiritual environment our residents call "home."

Consider, if you will, the reasons that the elderly and the infirm come to live in nursing homes:

- A lack of family members to care for them (or their inability to do so)
- Varying degrees of dementia on the part of residents
- The diminishing ability of residents to perform activities of daily living
- Residents' lack of finances (and possible loss of personal property)

Each of these reasons is a depressing scenario in itself.

Now assume for the moment that you, the reader, provide care for a nursing home population. You might be a nurse; certified nursing assistant; dietary worker; activities director; or a member of the environmental, maintenance, or laundry staff.

Imagine being one of the caretakers responsible for providing nutrition, activities of daily living, toileting, restorative programs, preventive skin care, fall prevention, or therapeutic activities on a daily basis—"twenty-four/seven," so to speak.

Staff members in long-term care and independent living facilities find themselves in the position of being "family" to their residents. This means



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that not only are they pressured by all the stresses of their own family lives, they find these stresses compounded each time they walk through the door of their workplace. At Sacred Heart Manor, our staff members experience the grieving process frequently. Funerals for residents are often held in the chapel where the resident attended daily Mass, and staff members are encouraged to attend them.

## MISSION MONTH

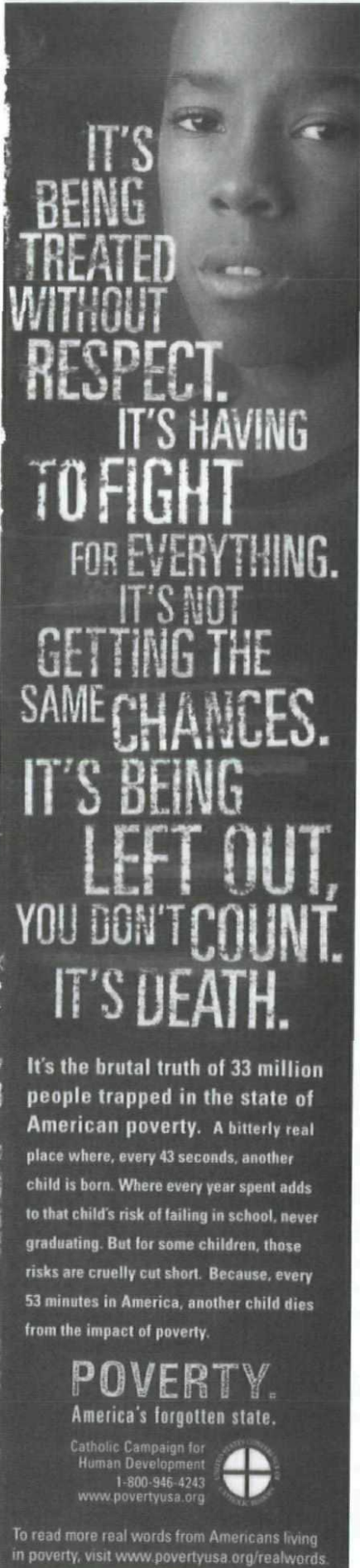
May 2002 was Mission Month at Sacred Heart Manor, a time our administration felt it was appropriate to provide the staff with the holistic caring they show the residents on a daily basis. Employers must, after all, recognize their responsibility to the health and welfare of their staffs. At our facility, the calendar posted for Mission Month featured activities that, I strongly feel, fulfilled Sacred Heart Manor's responsibility.

In lieu of the regular mandatory monthly in-service, we gave each staff member a wallet-sized attendance card. When he or she attended any of the "qualifying" segments, it was duly noted on this card. Attendance at three of the facility's health and welfare activities fulfilled a staff member's monthly mandatory in-service requirement. Allowing them to pick and choose in this way gave them a feeling of empowerment and control over their educational destiny. This was a good thing—good for the mind and, therefore, good for the body. Any additional benefits reaped were "gravy," as far as I was concerned.

Some of these presentations were primarily for the body. They were:

- A vision screening by the Philadelphia College of Optometry
- An oral cancer screening by the University of Pennsylvania Dental School
- A blood pressure screening by the employee health nurse
- Nutritional information by Jeanette Bourdeau, Sacred Heart Manor's dietician
- Reiki by Margaret Koons, our compliance

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IT'S  
BEING  
TREATED  
WITHOUT  
RESPECT.  
IT'S HAVING  
TO FIGHT  
FOR EVERYTHING.  
IT'S NOT  
GETTING THE  
SAME CHANCES.  
IT'S BEING  
LEFT OUT,  
YOU DON'T COUNT.  
IT'S DEATH.

It's the brutal truth of 33 million people trapped in the state of American poverty. A bitterly real place where, every 43 seconds, another child is born. Where every year spent adds to that child's risk of failing in school, never graduating. But for some children, those risks are cruelly cut short. Because, every 53 minutes in America, another child dies from the impact of poverty.

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## FINAL SAY

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officer

- A therapeutic massage by Maureen Fitzgerald, a certified local masseuse

- A presentation on healing touch by Sr. Eileen Fitzsimmons, O.Carm., the nursing supervisor of our independent living and personal care facility

- Relaxation techniques to deal with stress, by Ruth Hoskins, a local stress management consultant

- A talk on personal safety by a representative of the Philadelphia Police Department

For minds, we offered:

- The humor of Loretta LaRoach, a nationally known speaker

- "Reflections" by Sr. Patricia Michael, O.Carm., our administrator

- "Connecting with Nature" by Sr. Lois Wetzler, O.Carm., our assistant administrator

- Guided imagery with music therapy by Carol Carpenter, of our facility's activities department

In addition, we offered:

- Gospel music, in which Dot Newton, a locally known singer, led the staff and residents through a wonderful program of gospel singing

- "A Tribute to 9/11," in which Kathleen Torpey, our director of admissions, reminded us that time will not erase some memories and that the strength of our country lies within each of us

- A talk on organ donation, in which a coordinator from the Delaware Valley Transplant Program reminded us that we are able to give of ourselves more than we know

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

Also for Mission Month, we began a Chub Club. The club ran from May 1 to July 1. The aim of the club—whose slogan was "Hate the Weight? Shed the Spread"—was weight reduction. The person who managed to lose the most weight during these two months was declared the winner. She received a monetary reward (besides being 22

pounds lighter). Staff members have asked us to continue the weekly weigh-ins, perhaps sweetening the pot with a dollar a week; the dollars would go to the person who has lost the most weight by the end of the month.

In addition, we placed in the lobby a large poster containing a number of photographs. Some were baby photos; others were photos taken from staff ID badges. Staff and residents alike were asked to match the baby photos with the ID photos. This activity caught everyone's attention. The person who correctly matched the most photos won four movie tickets.

Sacred Heart Manor's core value of hospitality was demonstrated during certain gastronomical events we organized, such as the Ice Cream Social and the Italian Ice and Soft Pretzel Day. Each staff member brought a resident along, so that residents also enjoyed these celebrations. On the day we set aside for staff appreciation—we called it Hoagie Day—Sr. Michael, our administrator, served hoagies, macaroni salad, pickles, chips, cookies, and sodas out on the patio.

### APPRECIATION RIGHTLY DESERVED

As our facility's director of education, I personally had a sense of fulfillment each time during Mission Month that I heard a staff member excitedly ask, "What's going on today?" Not once did I hear a moan or a groan about having to attend an in-service session. Indeed, staff members were actually proud of the fact that they attended far more than the three required sessions. A response like that is music to any education coordinator's ears.

Although there was constant activity during the month (activity requiring a great deal of organizing), I was rewarded with the knowledge that our staff members felt the appreciation they so rightly deserve.

Only time will tell what surprises our next Mission Month will hold. □

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# HEALTH PROGRESS®

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