

Spreading Hope and Faith to Troubled Women

BY GABRIEL KILEY

Mr. Kiley is managing editor, Health Progress, Catholic Health Association, St. Louis.

**CELEBRATING
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THE MISSION**

KATHLEEN
MONTGOMERY

Kathleen Montgomery looks no further than the founders of her employer for inspiration as manager of the Mercy Women's Center in Sacramento, Calif.

"I'm so honored to work for the Sisters of Mercy. It's the first thing I say when someone asks me what I do," Montgomery said. "[The sisters] are an amazing group. The founders were a gusty group of women. The sisters today have just as much fortitude and vision and pure grit."

Belief in the healing mission of Jesus Christ drives Montgomery as the day-to-day leader of Mercy Women's Center, which opened in 1993. The outpatient center is part of Mercy San Juan Medical Center, which is owned and operated by Catholic Healthcare West. The women's center serves four of the health system's facilities in California's state capital, and offers wellness pro-

grams, childbirth and parenting classes, lactation services and a variety of support groups. It also operates programs aimed at preventing domestic violence and perinatal substance abuse.

"The women's center is an extremely successful place that offers tools for women to stay away from drugs and alcohol and gives them opportunities to grow into the women they are meant to be," Montgomery said.

Colleagues say the success of the women's center is attributed to Montgomery's leadership, religious faith and upbeat personality.

"Kathleen has a true respect for all people," said Gail Maduri, vice president of women and children's services at Mercy San Juan Medical Center. "One of the hallmarks of this program is her ability to attract staff. There's a waiting list of people wanting to work in the program. It is considered *the* program for substance abuse. People call her to work here."

Maduri credits Montgomery for establishing a diverse base of employees at Mercy Women's Center. "People from various ethnic and cultural and religious backgrounds come here for help, and it matches our workforce," Maduri said.

In fact, Montgomery credits Maduri for helping her "take pride in coaching and mentoring my staff so they can further their professional development."

"We have a phenomenal staff with multiple experiences and a breadth of expertise," Montgomery said. "What they bring to the program makes us better."

One of the success stories at the women's center is the Perinatal Recovery Network, which helps mothers and expectant mothers suffering with substance abuse and seeking a new start in life. Through counseling and education, the outpatient program helps low-income women suffering from physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Officials say the typical patient reports addiction to several drugs, and usually has a history of legal entanglements and incarceration.

Proof of the clinic's success is shown in the data. Hospital officials say 73 percent of clients complete the first 90 days of treatment compared to the 30 percent national average. Even more, 60 percent of those women go on to complete



Neil Mitchell/Axiom

Kathleen Montgomery is the manager of Mercy Women's Center in Sacramento, Calif.



Neil Michel/Axiom

Montgomery plays with 7-month-old Davonta in the child nursery at the Mercy Women's Center.

180 days of treatment, compared to the national average of 38 percent. And 100 percent of the clients that complete the 180-day program ultimately finish the network's parenting class.

The clinic uses a multi-disciplinary approach using doctors, nurses, social workers, educators, law enforcement and community-based agencies to help these women. Plus, a family law attorney volunteers to educate patients regarding parental rights and the family court system.

"One of the amazing things that you have to give Kathleen credit for is when I asked her to take over the (Perinatal Recovery Network in 2003), we had different issues and the program was not on solid ground," Maduri said. "With her amazing skills for organization and structure, she has turned it around."

One of the reasons for the program's success, Montgomery said, is the staff's ability to focus on the women's strengths. "The women here remind me every day what true courage really is. The women are going after the life they deserve. It's not easy for them. They rely on public transportation, live in poverty, and often have people telling them that they are worthless."

Montgomery's ability to network with political and organizational leaders in Sacramento is

another reason for the success of the women's center, colleagues said. In return, she has been able to raise funds for, and increase the community's awareness of the center.

"Kathleen finds donors and people who believe in the program so we've been able to triple our space," Maduri said. "After all, children need space to play while their mothers get treatment and participate in other activities."

Montgomery believes she "has been given talent and gifts for connecting and networking." She's also a community activist for various causes. "It's real difficult to describe how much it means to me to make a difference in the world," she said. "You can't do it yourself. I take the opportunity through church, volunteering and other areas to do that."

Montgomery's 35-year career in health care, including the past 24 years at Mercy San Juan, has been focused primarily in women's health. Prior to working at Mercy San Juan, Montgomery

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—Kathleen Montgomery

worked for a local obstetrician and was self-employed as a childbirth educator and labor doula. She also volunteered with La Leche League International, an organization that provides information to mothers wanting to breast-feed their babies. In 1984, she started teaching childbirth preparation classes at Mercy, and the position evolved into coordinating the prenatal education program, which evolved into a maternal/child education department with Montgomery serving as supervisor and manager.

“She has an absolute commitment to the healing ministry of Jesus Christ,” Maduri said.

“That’s the foundation that has built her life, her career. All of what she is about is the belief in the healing ministry. It’s played out in many ways throughout her career.”

Montgomery’s career nearly took a different path when she considered entering a seminary on two separate occasions to become an Episcopal priest. “I decided, however, that I was called to be the very best lay person I can be and spread the Gospel out in my community,” she said.

Faith, she said, continues to be her driving force as she leads the Mercy Women’s Center to help disadvantaged women in Sacramento.

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Montgomery often spends time with patients and their children at the women’s center.

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