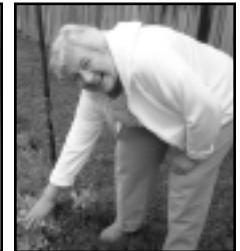


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# WINDOWS ON HOPE



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## The Advocate Center ~ A Place of Welcome, Trust, and Hope

*A*dvocate Center seemed an appropriate title when we opened the Center in 1990 in Norton, Virginia. Initially, we worked from our home, going out each day to patients in need of home health services. Having been in the area since 1977, we were well aware of the services already available and other services that were sorely needed. At that time we were the only agency, besides the health department, providing home health services. As the number of agencies in our area multiplied, we received an increasing number of calls, from both individuals and agencies, asking for information about where to go to fulfill certain needs. It seemed we had become knowledgeable about services, or the lack of services, for families seeking help. A physician once told us,

Margaret Flynn, OP & Beth Jaspers, OP

“It seems that you serve the people who fall between the cracks.” Eventually, in an effort to be more available to local folks, we rented a storefront on Main Street in Norton from which we serve, not only the city of Norton, but also Wise County and the Appalachian community of southwest Virginia.

Our brochure describes an advocate as: “a vocal supporter, one who speaks for another, a friend, pleader, counselor, listener.” We understand that we advocate for the individual, to the individual, and to the human services groups as well as to the political system. Our goal is to improve the quality of life for individuals and families struggling to provide basic needs. We are aware of the need for the Holy Spirit’s help in all our endeavors.



*Sister Margaret Flynn (top) and Sister Beth Jaspers are engaged in community health and advocacy at the Advocate Center which they founded in Norton, Virginia.*



*Sister Margaret, left, checks the food pantry, while Sister Beth, below, counsels one of the many clients who depend on assistance from the Advocate Center.*



People often ask us “How do people know about you?” We are known by agencies and individuals alike. Probably two thirds of new referrals relate: “My cousin/neighbor/friend gave me your number and said you might be able help me.” The remaining referrals are from human service providers or churches.

Families benefit from the financial or material assistance we provide on a limited basis. More crucial, however, is listening to their stories. We respond with concrete actions when we can, and we respond with the truth at those times when the need is beyond our capability. Hard as it is, we simply and truthfully say: “I don’t know where you can get help for that need.”

Our work as advocates also includes communicating specific and general situations to the agency board, directors and staff as well as local, state and federal representatives. Because of the small population where we serve, it is easier to get to know our political representatives. Once, we commented to a state representative that the welfare reform legislation had resulted in fewer people being enrolled but in an increase in the number of families living in poverty. This legislator had the courage to say, “It is not a politically receptive time for looking into that.”

We appreciated his honesty, but that didn't stop us from advocating on the welfare issue.

Another aspect of being an advocate is explaining to someone how they can do some advocacy for themselves, e.g. how to get through the phone system of an agency, what specific questions to ask, and when to contact a lawyer for legal representation. There are occasions when we refuse help because the individual has not followed through with what other help was suggested and is available.

The Advocate Center is a bridge between agency and individual. We listen as the situation or problem is presented by the individual. When it seems to be an issue shared by many, we bring the concern to local groups. Over the years this has resulted in collaborating to open a domestic violence shelter, a food bank, legal services, chore services for the elderly, a homeless shelter, and a children's advocacy center.

We have truly been blessed with the funding and support that we receive—from the Dominican Sisters Ministry Trust and the Dominican Sisters Ministry Fund,\* the variety of grants that we write each year, and the significant number of faithful donors who remember us monthly. Household and personal items are donated by local churches and organizations.

We have been honored to hear the stories of so many struggling families and we get a new understanding of the two worlds within the United States when we relate the reality of poverty to those who have been blessed with so much. This is especially true when we give reflections at the parishes each year. People come up and thank us for what we are doing but also state: "I had no idea that people in our country had such struggles anymore." 



**The Dominican Sisters of Hope Ministry Trust** aids the poor and needy in our society while, at the same time, empowering them and assisting in their development.

**The Dominican Sisters of Hope Ministry Fund** supports members in ministries that address our mission to "preach the Gospel to our world" and to "commit our lives to the transforming power of hope."

For more information on how to contribute to either of these two funds write: [info@ophope.org](mailto:info@ophope.org).



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