

Providing Quality Health Care for Women and Children

by Eric Sells

As the population of single, working mothers who cannot afford health care expands, a Phoenix-based organization is working tirelessly to provide them with high-quality integrated care at no cost.

WellCare Foundation delivers a comprehensive approach to health and wellness, focusing on the whole person through physical, mental and emotional support. The non-profit boasts a network of 136 licensed practitioners at five clinical sites across the Valley who donate a broad range of conventional, complementary and alternative medical services. This team collectively serves about 750 patients each year.

WellCare founder Marge Ebeling spent most of her career as a registered nurse in a variety of fields. After 20 years, she returned to school

to focus on religious studies. As she began working in clinical pastoral education at a local hospital, Marge witnessed the link between spirituality and health care. At the same time, she began speaking at numerous events and discovered the large population of single mothers who needed services and support but could not afford them.

She established WellCare in 1999 to help support the estimated 175,000 single working mothers in Maricopa County alone in this category.

In addition to being single and employed, WellCare requires that participants demonstrate an inability to afford health insurance or required health care for themselves and their children. They cannot be on any state assistance.

At each clinic, attention is given to providing continuing and preven-

tative care so participants remain healthy. Marge commented this allows them to focus on achieving their dreams and goals. A new patient may come in with a specific condition, but a full assessment is performed so that the child may leave with appointments to see a pediatrician, dentist or counselor, for example.

"We become their medical home and primary care providers," she explained. "Even if we treat their initial needs, they can call on us for



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other requirements. Appointments are a minimum of one hour long in order to deliver quality care to each person, based on our integrative model."

There are no out-of-pocket expenses. Marge remarked that some moms keep expecting there will be an expense or hidden fee some-

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The advertisement features a background image of a woman in a dark, patterned top sitting on a table, working with a client who is lying down. The setting appears to be a therapy room. The text is overlaid on a dark, atmospheric background that suggests a sunset or sunrise over a mountain range.

where. "Once they finally realize that everything here is free, many break down and cry. And we cry along with them," she said.

Clinic facilities are purposely decorated with children in mind, incorporating music, aromatherapy, ample toys, and vibrant colors on the walls.

"Kids ask us if this is a playground," she laughed. "We give a lot of hugs here."

To support the growing need for services, Marge is constantly seeking out new practitioners to volunteer their time and expertise. Her goal is to reach 250 by next year, with a recruitment focus on service providers in the areas of gastrointestinal, pulmonary, cardiology, pediatrics, internal medicine and counselors.

"Of all the nursing jobs I've had, this is the most rewarding work I've ever done because of the model of holistic health and wellness," Marge commented. "Our patients are our family."

WellCare Foundation is located at 55 E. Lexington Avenue in Phoenix. If you are interested in learning more about WellCare and applying for services, contact 602-263-7619. Health-care practitioners interested in volunteering should contact Marge directly. For more information, visit WellCareFoundation.org.

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