

2007 Lifetime Achievement Award

Barbara Sarah, LCSW, ACSW



Barbara Sarah's career as a professional social worker spans more than 34 years. She is an innovator, an educator, a therapist, and a community activist who is extremely devoted to her profession. Barbara doesn't miss an opportunity to advocate on behalf of social workers in any setting.

For 20 years she worked as a school social worker and drug and alcohol prevention counselor in the Great Neck (NY) Public School system. She founded and directed O.K. (Ordinary Kids) Theatre at Great Neck North High School. This innovative program lasted 16 years and gave hundreds of teenagers the opportunity to educate their peers and community through the arts. Barbara traveled with the youth performers to present all over New York State and in Canada. They also held workshops in California, Minnesota, as well as summer long workshops on Long Island and in Poughkeepsie, NY. In 1990, the program was featured on CBS "Thirty Minutes" (Sixty Minutes for Teens).

In 1992, after Barbara was diagnosed with breast cancer, she became aware that there was not enough support and education available so she founded the Mid-Hudson Breast Health Action Project. The MHBHAP later became Breast Cancer Options, a successful and well-funded breast cancer advocacy organization. In 1994, Barbara became a permanent resident of Ulster County and began working as an oncology social worker at Benedictine Hospital in Kingston, NY where she was a founding staff member of the Fern Feldman Anolick Breast Center.

Under Barbara's visionary direction, what was originally a part-time position supporting women newly diagnosed with breast cancer, grew into a nationally recognized, comprehensive oncology support program offering a vast array of support services to men and women with any type of cancer, as well as their families, children, and friends. In addition

to providing state-of-the-art cancer support services, Barbara implemented and raised funding for several successful ground-breaking programs: the Nurturing Neighborhood Network, a peer support program that links up newly diagnosed patients with volunteer cancer survivors for support and education; the Healing Circle Improv Group, a unique performing team of cancer survivors that visits patients in the hospital and in their homes; and the Integrative Health and Wellness Lecture Series which brings in diverse presenters from around the country to present complementary techniques and approaches relevant to cancer patients.

In developing the Oncology Support Program, Barbara sought inspiration from two Japanese therapies, Morita Therapy (which she uses to teach "Living Fully with Illness") and Naikan (reflecting on life's gifts and improving life choices). She initiated an exchange program with a cancer support clinic in Kurashiki, Japan, which is still active today. Barbara is also a founding member of the complementary medicine committee at Benedictine Hospital and has been central to the subsequent creation of the Complementary Medicine Program, which assists in bringing other forms of medicine such as acupuncture and massage and aromatherapy to patients.

Through her career, Barbara has been a devoted activist, volunteering her time and skills to improve the political process as well as mobilize the community to participate on issues such as healthcare. Nationally, Barbara served four years as a Consumer Advocate and Consumer Presenter on the Peer Review Panel of the Department of Defense's Breast Cancer Research Program, a project that was brought about as a result of grassroots activism to support breast cancer research.

Among her countless awards and accolades, she has received a number of awards from Benedictine Hospital over her 12 years of service. She was selected as the NASW-NYS Nassau Division Social Worker of the Year in 1981. Barbara is a founding member of Ulster County Cohousing community located in Rosendale, NY. In 2002, Barbara was honored by the YWCA of Ulster County "Tribute to Women", which recognized women who have made a significant impact on their

community. More recently she received an award from Governor Pataki for Breast Cancer Research and Education which was presented in 2005. Ms. Sarah's outstanding service, generous and creative spirit, advocacy, and perseverance on behalf of the profession and those she serves, represents the essence of social work.

Presently Barbara is a part-time consultant for the Oncology Support Program and has started a business entitled *Third Opinion*, providing information and support for cancer patients and their families. She also currently serves on the Board of Jewish Family Services of Ulster County, as Vice Pres of the Chamber Arts Festival of Marbletown, and is on the Steering Committees of Citizen Action of the Hudson Valley and the Network of Spiritual Progressives- Hudson Valley Chapter. She is a long-standing member of the National Association of Social Workers and the Association of Oncology Social Workers and presents annually at numerous oncology social work conferences. Over the years, Barbara has supervised 20 MSW interns and 6 BSW interns. Barbara is a MSW graduate of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University and also holds a BA in Music from Queens College. Barbara is married to Marty Laforse and is a mother of three, Nancie, Erica, and Jennifer and Bubbie of Alexandra and Nathaniel.