

## *Reflecting on 30 years of practice and giving back.*

### *2015 Humanitarian Co-recipient Karen Barth*

**Karen Barth is a massage therapist and Zero Balancer in private practice in Louisville, KY. She is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, serving as executive director of Empty Vessels Healing Ministry. For more information about Open Hands Wellness Clinic, you can email her at [emptyvessels1@gmail.com](mailto:emptyvessels1@gmail.com).**



**Volunteers at Open Hands Wellness Clinic, posted left to right; Betsy Whittemore, Karen Barth, Beverly Byrum, Mary Flanagan, Rebecca Cohen, Katherine Williams, and Seema Matthew**

I want to thank AMTA-KY for awarding me the chapter humanitarian award for 2015. I have now been practicing massage therapy professionally for over 30 years. The reality of making a living has meant that often I had to limit my clientele to people that could afford my fee. But through the years I have experienced a growing passion to provide care to those most in need, often those who can least afford it.

I have been able to provide that care in a variety of ways. At the Louisville School of Massage, I was able to develop and implement the Student Practicum portion of the curriculum. This entailed developing relationships with agencies where clients could be served by student massage therapists. The first of these was Hospice of Louisville (now known as Hosparus). Other agencies followed including the Center for Women and Families and the Kling Center.

In 2004, I volunteered at United Crescent Hill Ministries providing Zero Balancing and massage therapy to senior adults each Tuesday. In 2006 I experienced a spiritual call to attend seminary. For my senior project, I studied the history of healing in the Christian church and envisioned a church-based center for alternative and complementary care.

In 2012, I was ordained as a minister and called to develop and serve Empty Vessels Healing Ministry, a ministry of innovation. As of this year Empty Vessels has become a public charity with IRS 501(c)3 status. Our mission is to foster wholeness and healing in the world through access to professional complementary health therapies and pastoral presence. Fellow AMTA member Jill Bath was integral in the co-founding of the ministry.

The main program of Empty Vessels is the Open Hands Wellness Clinic for body, mind and spirit. Begun in February of 2013. AMTA member and award co-recipient Katherine Williams is also a founding practitioner and volunteer at the clinic. For free, we provide complementary health therapies such as acupuncture, massage therapy, acupressure, cranio-sacral therapy, healing touch and Zero Balancing. We are staffed by volunteer, professional practitioners who share the passion of providing to those most in need. Care is provided in a community style setting. As a group, the practitioners hold each client in collective care.

The rewards of serving in this kind of atmosphere are myriad. We experience community and the satisfaction of giving without monetary reward. We see clients experience the benefits of regular care that they would not be able to have otherwise. We learn of others in Louisville who are also giving in so many ways. We have a sense of contributing to the larger community. In this world which can so often seem chaotic and difficult, we have made an oasis of rest and rejuvenation that is about more than our individual selves or even individual clients.

There is a phrase from my tradition, "Blessed to be a blessing." Serving as a massage therapist, that is what I have experienced. As I have given, my capacity to give has grown. And this desire to give has resonated with the desire of others to give so that we can do more together than we could do in individual practice. These capacities have been nurtured in me through different avenues. An important one has been the nurturing and development I have received through volunteering and service in AMTA on both state and national levels. I will be forever grateful for the professional and personal growth I have found through AMTA.