



ERIE FAMILY HEALTH CENTER 2015 ANNUAL LUNCHEON *My Erie Inspiration*

I AM MONA VAN KANEGAN, a dentist at Erie Humboldt Park, and I have been at Erie for five years. Let me tell you about “Tom”, my Erie inspiration...

I work exclusively with Erie’s *Lending Hands for Life* program, which cares for our health centers’ HIV patients. Unlike most of Erie’s other dentists, I only treat adults—so not a lot of crying in my chair. In fact, if there is crying, there is something that I am not doing right.



You may guess that *LHL* patients in particular have been through a lot, and continue to have challenging lives. I cannot imagine the strength and courage they need to draw on to get through each and every day. So when they get to the dental clinic, we try not to add to all the things they are juggling. We assess their needs, work to provide treatment and keep them coming back for preventive oral health services. We try to surprise them and work to exceed their expectations.

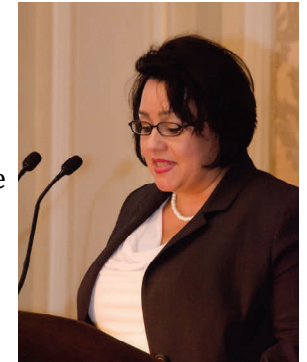
I first met Tom soon after I started working at Erie. As with many of my patients, he had not had dental care for what he reported as “years and years”. There was much to do. When we were nearing the completion of his treatment, Tom said to me, “if I had known that this is how it could be at a dental clinic, I would have come earlier. I had a good job, I had dental insurance.” But in many places, people with HIV struggle to find a dentist that will care for them. It’s not easy ... but not at Erie.

Tom came to Erie with a lot of questions and anxiety. First, was he going to be seen? Then, was he going to be treated well? At each step, he was so open to learning about what he could do to keep himself healthy. He has made a lot of changes in his life. Now, Tom is back at work, has many friends, gives back through support groups. He always comes to see us for his preventive visits – smiling. He has such a great outlook on life, he takes each challenge as it comes, with grace.

Tom is my Erie inspiration.

I AM NORMA MENDEZ, a Patient Navigator at Erie Foster Avenue Health Center, and I have been at Erie for almost six months. Let me tell you about “John”, my Erie inspiration...

John sat across from me with tears in his eyes. He was in great need of medical care, yet he had lost his job after 23 years, and he and his wife had recently separated. With no income, even his adult children turned their backs, refusing to help support him. He had lost his job, his family and his hope. He was embarrassed to ask for assistance. He pleaded with me, “Please, I am a hard worker. A very good and honest man. Can you please help me?”



I led John through the screening, and discovered he was eligible for Medicaid. However, I wasn’t certain that his case would be approved, since his wife claimed him as a tax dependant before they separated. I helped John write a letter to the Department of Human Services telling his story. I registered him as an Erie patient, and scheduled his first appointment. He was overwhelmingly grateful. John told me, “I have faith in God that I will get approved.” Now we just had to wait.

Several weeks later, John returned to the clinic, sat at my table and pulled a stack of mail from his bag. He didn’t understand the information he had received, and came to me for help to make sense of it. As I sorted through the letters, I reminded him that, together, we needed to have faith. Then I found it: his Medicaid card. He had been approved!

With tears of joy and relief this time, John thanked God, Erie Family Health Center and me. He could now see the doctor without worry – and even said he was going to have dental work done. I was just as excited as he was.

Despite a series of bad blows, John never lost his faith. And something as small as an insurance card – this one break – restored his hope. Now he’s on the way to restoring his health, too.

John is my Erie inspiration.



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I AM JACKIE MCSPARRON, a physician assistant at Erie Westside and Erie Clemente School-Based Health Centers, and I have been at Erie for two and a half years. Let me tell you about “Jessica”, my Erie inspiration...

As a medical provider in school based health, I have a unique opportunity to see my young patients differently. I see them in a less formal setting, and without their parents present. This allows me to truly witness them develop into the independent decision makers that they need to be.

Jessica first came to the clinic at Clemente High School about two and a half years ago. She had recently found out that she was six months pregnant as the result of an assault and she had just started her freshman year. Jessica came to see our midwife for all of her prenatal appointments and was a model expectant mother who delivered a beautiful baby girl at Northwestern.

During this time, however, she and her mother lost their housing. They moved into a shelter on the other side of the city. Where most of us would be distraught with the trials life had thrown at us, Jessica just kept working.

When her baby was up all night teething, she came to school. Though she commuted 45 minutes each way by bus, she came to school. And not only did she come to school, but she started becoming an active member of the school community. She became an advocate and a mentor for other students. I cannot count the times she has come in to the clinic with other students to encourage them to get medical services they need. Jessica is a member of our student advisory board, she is a member of the teen mother's group, and she works with After School Matters.

This young woman has proven to me that there is no limit to the strength and resilience of the human spirit. And when she achieves her dream of becoming a Pediatrician, I can only hope that we will all be lucky enough to call her an Erie colleague.

Jessica is my Erie inspiration.



I AM BEN PREYSS, a third year family medicine resident in Northwestern's Family Medicine Program at Erie Humboldt Park. Let me tell you about “Frankie”, my Erie inspiration...

I met Frankie three years ago in the hospital. He was literally on his deathbed. It was probably the third time I'd seen him in this shape and we were starting to discuss hospice services for him.

Frankie had been admitted for severe heart failure, which had been exacerbated by his substance use and his inability to take his medications, which was linked to his severe depression and his poverty. At that time, his heart was barely pumping hard enough to circulate his blood. You and me – our heart pumps 65% or more of the blood that enters our heart. Frankie's heart was able to circulate about 10% of his. His prognosis was terrible, probably less than year, maybe two if he rallied.

And boy did Frankie rally. You see, Frankie never had a team in his corner. He had a few doctors along the way but he never had a dynamic, multi-professional team that could meet his complex needs. And that's *really* what makes Erie so unique. At Erie, Frankie sees me regularly and we manage his heart failure, blood pressure and his preventive care. Our nurses have taught him how to better manage his fluid status. He's on first name basis with our pharmacist and never misses his refills anymore. He has a behavioral health therapist that has helped him with his depression and guilt and works closely with another community partner that has helped him stay sober for more than two years now.

The other day I saw Frankie to go over his most recent heart ultrasound results. As I was catching up with him and pulling up the results, I asked “how'd the heart ultrasound go?” He was silent, which is very rare for Frankie. I looked up and saw that he was tearing up. He said: “Hey Papi, look at me...look at me...[flexes, smiles, and taps his chest over heart]...they say I'm a new man with a new heart.”

Frankie is a new man. His heart is pumping at a normal level now. He's on just a few medications. He looks 10 years younger. He's sober. He's working with other recovering drug users. He's living a good life. He's why I believe in community health centers like Erie and why it's a privilege to work there.

Frankie is my Erie inspiration.

