

Health Care Heroes Community Outreach Winner: Barbara Garden, director, Terros Health

Aug 23, 2018, 9:00am MST

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More than 30 years ago, [Barbara Garden](#), was on a dental career path when she decided to take a different road.

“Working at [Terros Health](#) was an accidental outcome of a midlife crisis,” said Garden, 73. “During my younger years, I worked in the dental field. Throughout my life, I encountered many people who struggled with substance abuse, mental health and gender identity issues, and because of the stigma surrounding these issues avoided seeking assistance. For many, there was very little affordable help available, even if they were open to receiving it.”

Garden realized she was passionate about reducing the stigma of drug addiction and wanted to advocate for health equity. She went back to school and earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Arizona State University, as well as a certificate in gerontology. After graduating in 1989, she began volunteering as a counselor for Terros Health. Today, Garden is Terros' director of community relations. During her 29 years at Terros, she has seen some major changes.

“At that time, Terros Health was known for providing ambulatory detoxification, substance use treatment and mobile crisis services,” Garden said. “The mental health system at that time was much more primitive than it is today. As a member of the mobile crisis team, I learned so much about substance abuse, co-occurring substance abuse and mental health and how those illnesses impact the ability to maintain stability in employment, housing and relationships.”

When she started working at Terros Health, it had one location and 60 employees. Today, it has 20 locations, 1,000 employees and serves Maricopa, Coconino, La Paz, Mohave, Pima, Pinal, Yavapai and Yuma counties.

Garden said Terros Health is now a premier behaviorally led, integrated health-care company. It provides primary family medical care, mental health care, substance use and co-occurring disorders care, mobile crisis services, residential transitional living, community and school-based prevention, and HIV/STI prevention, education and testing.



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Barbara Garden, center, has a broad definition of community outreach at Terros Health.

“When I first became interested in this field, substance abuse was considered a moral failing,” she said. “Today, a significant body of research shows that addiction is a chronic illness like asthma, hypertension and diabetes.”

Garden points out while addiction is a disease that doesn’t discriminate, the stigma persists.

“Many people don’t want to talk about it because they’re afraid of losing their jobs, friends and family if anyone finds out about their substance use disorder,” she said. “They also worry that doctors might treat them differently.”

As a licensed independent substance abuse counselor, Garden started as a volunteer for Terros Health's mobile crisis unit. In 1991, she was hired as a mobile crisis counselor, and over the years has held positions as team facilitator, mobile crisis team coordinator, director of mobile crisis, ambulatory detoxification and more.

In 2009, she was named director of community outreach and has broadly defined her role. For Garden, her "community" includes patients in crisis and those who might avoid slipping into crisis with the proper education. It also includes other organizations, agencies, influencers and funders who can help. She is the face of Terros Health at community meetings, health fairs, luncheons and task forces.

One day, Garden is working with her substance use prevention teams on education programs for Hispanic families. The next, she is reviewing policies, procedures and grant requirements for new community programs or perhaps speaking at health fairs, job fairs and conferences. To Garden, it's all community.

As long as her good health continues, Garden plans on continuing her work at Terros Health.

“I’m on a mission for life to empower people to be the best they can be,” she said. “If at some point I do retire, I would like to volunteer helping families access resources for their family members who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. I had many years of experience caring for my mother, my angel, who struggled with the disease.”

Barbara Garden

Title: Director of community relations

Company: Terros Health

In your view, what makes a hero? A hero is someone who is humble, caring, courageous, selfless and causes change.

Who you admire in health care? I especially admire the work of Nora Volkow, who has done groundbreaking work showing that addiction is a disease of the brain rather than a moral failing.

Who was your mentor? Penny Free, a past supervisor who challenged me every day of our 16 years together to step out of my comfort zone.

What’s the most rewarding part about working in health care? I’ve had the pleasure of meeting so many amazing people who have dedicated their lives to empowering others to attain the lives they desire.

Favorite way of giving back: A favorite way of giving back is mentoring others. I'm, by nature, a teacher. I'm excited by the potential I see in others and figuring out how to unleash it.

Three things always in your medicine cabinet: Icy Hot, Band-Aids and aspirin.