

Hashmat Effendi receives Community Angel Award

by Kim James

Hashmat Effendi's response to human suffering has put smiles on the faces of thousands of children around the world. And, because of that, Effendi is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Community Angel Award.

Bushra Qureshi, a friend, nominated Effendi. She commented, "Growing up as the child of a government official, a life of privilege gave Effendi perspective. In a wealthy Pakistani family, many things came easily, including medical care. Effendi remembers accompanying her father to different hospitals and clinics in Islamabad. They would be provided with excellent service and attended to quickly. She noticed, though, that those who had more pressing needs but happened to be poor were the last to be attended to, if at all."

Effendi said, "I used to ask my dad, 'Don't you think this is wrong? These people are waiting just because they are poor.' Isn't it our responsibility to help them, to help ease their pain?'"

Effendi's father acknowledged the disparity, agreeing that this particular practice of privilege was not fair, but was more concerned with his daughter's interest in these people - in Pakistan, the rich and poor do not associate with each other. He did not realize she was listening to her heart.

Following the example of Mother Teresa, Effendi decided to reach out to the poor in her community. By age 13, she was using her father's contacts to obtain free hospital treatment for beggars and poor children. She also collected medicine and clothing from her relatives and neighbors to distribute to the poor.

At 14, Effendi's friends began to criticize her, saying she couldn't make much of a difference by passing out vitamins to beggars. Though discouraged, she continued her outreach, fueled by a saying of Mother Teresa's, "We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean, but if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something."

In 1979, Effendi moved to the United States and began raising her family. She continued to reach out to those desperately needing medical treatment and built a network of medical professionals and organizations, engaging in a wider set of activities in the medical field across the world.

There was still a special place in her heart for children; perhaps motherhood had something to do with it. Effendi is a mother of three. In her travels, she noticed one thing was common across cultures – a mother's love for her child.

“The way I love my child and the way a woman in Nigeria or Kenya or Nairobi or Pakistan loves her child is the same,” she said.

Effendi worked persistently and spent much time in prayer, pulling together teams of doctors to lend their medical expertise and individuals who believed in and could help finance her project.

“You can have anything you want if you want it badly enough,” Effendi said. “You can be anything you want to be, do anything you set out to accomplish if you hold to that desire.”

With that attitude, Effendi’s dream became reality. The House of Charity, which she founded in 1996, is dedicated to improving the quality of life of underprivileged children of greater Houston and surrounding areas. Effendi’s passion is to ease the pain of children suffering from congenital deformities or severe burns and give them a chance at leading normal lives. To do this, House of Charity provides daily necessities and free surgical care to correct their deformities, disabilities and burns. Since its inception, House of Charity has helped more than 150,000 children worldwide.

House of Charity recently opened a distribution center where local low-income families can get clothing, household and other personal items at a discounted rate.

Abroad, House of Charity works to establish free clinics for burn revision and cleft lip/palate surgery and upgrade charity hospitals.

Though her vision of serving others is being realized daily, Effendi says the journey has been, and remains at times, a difficult one. The work is never done.

“I have seen plenty of pain and suffering,” she said, “I have seen people’s spirits dying because they have suffered so much.”

The work can be taxing, but the tasks at hand keep her going.

“It doesn’t matter where you are, where you see and meet people,” Effendi said, “You just have to reach them.”

Effendi’s drop in the ocean has definitely been noticed.

In 2008, Effendi was awarded the Tamgha-i-Imtiaz, the highest civilian award given by the government of Pakistan. House of Charity has been recognized by the City of Houston, Shriners Hospital for Children – Galveston and the Ninth Congressional District of Texas.

Effendi says she continues to be awed and humbled by the recognition she receives and is honored to receive this newest award.

Kim James is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.

