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WELLPOINT

SUMMER 2004

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2



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Associates Apply a Creative Touch to Send Well Wishes to a Young WellPoint Member

That Passion Is Expressed in Vivid Color Every Time the Wind Blows

Everyone dreams of a rewarding job that allows them to have a positive effect on others and make a difference in people's lives. For Annie Ohanians, Small Group supervisor of client services operations, that dream has not only become a reality, it has also brought forth friendships and opened doors to her heart that she never knew existed. "I always empathize with WellPoint members who I assist," says Annie. "But when I first spoke with Karen Herzog two years ago, I immediately identified with her. I can't really explain why, I think it's because I'm also a mother and I can relate to the obstacles and challenges that parents strive to overcome with their children."

As a WellPoint member dealing with an ill child, Karen had a lot of questions about her coverage. Her 1-year-old daughter Sophia had recently been diagnosed with Niemann-Pick Disease (NPD)—a rare illness that is characterized by a metabolism defect inside the cells and can lead to cell death and the malfunction of major organ systems.

"It's frightening because Sophia has a slim chance of survival, as do many other children with NPD," explains



Annie Ohanians, Small Group supervisor of client services operations (left), pictured with Senior Claims Processor Joan Pickard, who put her quilting experience to good use on the prayer flag project.

Prayer flags are believed to bring longevity to those nearby. Annie Ohanians and Joan Pickard collaborated to create this flag to show their support for young Sophia.

Annie. "During my conversations with Karen, I learned more and more about the disease and how it can affect a child's internal system. For example, many children with NPD can't eat or digest food and that can stunt their growth. That's why Karen was doing everything she could to save her daughter and she needed to know whether her insurance policy covered her preferred treatment options." Those included herbal treatments, physical therapy sessions and alternative therapies. "Some treatments were covered and some weren't," explains Annie. "It was my job to thoroughly explain the specifics of Sophia's coverage while also remaining sensitive to Karen's situation."

Although Annie covered a lot of ground during her initial phone conversation with Karen, she knew that additional questions would arise, which prompted her to give Karen her direct line. She also had Karen's claims sent directly to her mail stop so they could be expedited.

"I do that for all of the members who I serve," says Annie, "because I want them to know that they can rely on me. Karen expressed her appreciation because I took her questions seriously and did everything I could to help while also keeping her posted on any new information I received."

While Annie's commitment to provide excellent customer service applies to all WellPoint members, Karen's case took on a special meaning when associates in the client services operations unit learned about the little girl fighting NPD. "This particular case stole our hearts," says Annie. "Karen is an



Putting it All in Writing

Annie Ohanians was so touched by a member's struggle to care for her ill child that she agreed to submit this letter to the 2004 Blair L. Sadler International Healing Arts Competition on the member's behalf:

I came to know Karen Herzog (Sophia's mother) about two years ago through my job. I am a supervisor in the claims/customer service department at Blue Cross of California. I have been servicing Blue Cross members for the past 19 years. I enjoy my job and I believe in the company that I work for because our number one goal has always been to serve and care for each of our members. I know many companies say that, but I have the pleasure of working with a team who really puts those words into action.

When I first talked to Karen on the phone a few years ago, I could empathize with her, as I am a mother of two children. I could feel Karen's pain and her love and devotion for her sweet, little, innocent daughter, Sophia. I was in close contact with Karen to assist her with any questions and we became friends and she shared with me the "prayer flag project." She had touched my heart so I spoke with my staff about sweet Sophia and the project. With the help of one of my talented associates, Joan Pickard, we created a prayer flag for the little girl and sent it to Karen with all of our love and prayers.

Through my ongoing communication with Karen, she shared that the prayer flags transformed their house into a healing home care environment and grew Sophia's healing community. This case touched my heart and I admire Karen for her devotion, dedication and love for her precious daughter.

Sophia, Karen and their family are now part of my life. Every day, I think about them and keep them in my prayers.

Annie Ohanians

Small Group supervisor of client services operations

amazing woman who touches my entire unit in her effort to help her young daughter fight this rare illness. During these past few years, every associate in this department has expressed concern for Sophia's condition and we're all pulling for her."

To show their support, Senior Claims Processor Joan Pickard joined forces with Annie to create a special gift for Sophia—a prayer flag. "During one of our phone conversations, Karen told me that people from around the world were sending prayer flags to Sophia," says Annie. "I wanted to get involved so I asked Joan to help." Joan is an avid quilt maker and was eager to step in. "It's a case that touches you," she says. "I was sad when I first heard about Sophia, but I feel fortunate that I was able to do something to help." Joan says that she makes at least four quilts per year so it was a fairly easy project to complete. "I purchased the supplies that Friday and by Monday, we were able to wrap it with a nice card and mail it to Karen and Sophia."

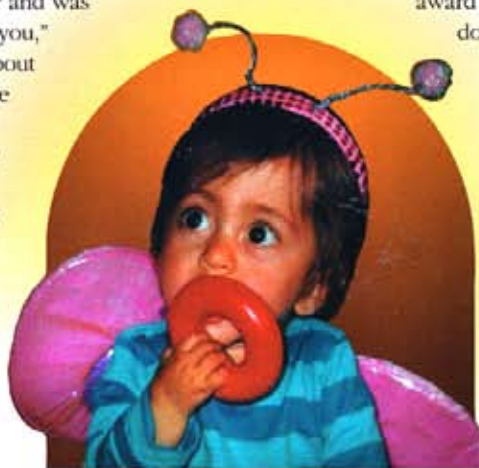
Today, the outside of Karen's home is adorned with dozens of colorful flags received from a network of supporters who've sent well wishes to Sophia. The wind is believed to carry the flags' prayers, which bring happiness, long life and prosperity to those nearby. Karen says she's grateful

to everyone who sent a flag and says she believes they're aiding in Sophia's healing process.

Still, Annie's passion for Sophia's case doesn't end there. A few months ago, Karen contacted Annie and asked if she would write a letter on her behalf to submit to the 2004 Blair L. Sadler International Healing Arts Competition, which presents awards to individuals and groups who have "improved the quality of the health care experience for patients." "I was obliged to draft a letter for Karen," says Annie. "But if I happen to win, the award will be donated to Karen and Sophia. I'm doing this for them, not for myself."

Recently, Annie and Joan received news that the prayer flag project won first place in the "Professional Participatory Arts" category of the competition. "I'm so excited and happy for Karen and Sophia," Annie says. "They really deserve it."

While the first-place prize certainly calls for celebration, Annie says that cases such as Karen's are bittersweet. "The circumstances are unfortunate," she says. "That's why I try to do everything I can to ease the burden for members who are in these types of situations. Members like Karen never cease to amaze me with their courage and determination. They inspire me to continue reaching out to WellPoint members every day." ♦



Sophia Herzog's chances of survival were slim when she was diagnosed with Niemann-Pick Disease at age 1. She recently celebrated her 4th birthday.