

Absence of Tears - The People

Their title is counselor, but they really play the role of mom in the shelter. They are the CM - Counselor/Mom. With little experience, small pay, few benefits, and no formal training, the counselors in the shelter are the backbone of the place as well as the parent.

In a shelter there are chores to be done every day. Floors must be vacuumed, bathrooms scrubbed, trash removed, bedding washed, refrigerator cleaned, patio swept, clothing donations taken to the basement, coffee made, and cereal served. The CM assigns the jobs and sees that they are done. She frowns at the slacker and smiles at the achiever. She tries to hit a happy medium between requirement and nagging. She has a time schedule and tries to keep to it without too much agonizing or too little discipline.

And she does it all with people gathered around the central desk, the telephone ringing, and a constant search for necessities like pens and paper.

The CM dispenses a steady stream of baby food, hand cream, paper cups, mail, messages, and quarters for laundry. In between she schedules appointments, does intake information on new residents, and answers a thousand questions. All the ordinary mother stuff?

She takes the new person downstairs to find clothes for herself and her children. When a woman has a job interview, she helps her put together an outfit that will help get her foot in the door. Just like a mother at the start of school?

When a group or an organization comes to the shelter to serve food or present a program, it is the CM who sees that the dayroom is prepared and the residents ready. A mother hostess?

When an abused woman is brought to the door by a police car, the CM finds her a place, determines if she needs medical aid, patches her up the best she can, speaks the soothing words, and settles her for a night of