

Barbara

# ESTHER WOLF



Photo: Dan White

**W**alk into Esther Valladolid Wolf's Kansas home and you are likely to see little notes stuck where the eyes can't miss them. They're not reminders to take the dog to the vet or pick up the dry cleaning, but action-oriented messages. Her favorite: "I act as if what I do makes a difference."

If you believe you can make a difference, you can, explains Wolf, 47, whose own tireless work more than proves her point. Six years ago she left her consulting business for nursing homes to become the administrator of a Kansas City health clinic so decrepit it was on the verge of being closed. Now, the Richard Cabot Clinic provides quality medical care to poor Hispanic families.

Her swift and thorough actions at the clinic led Kansas governor Mike Hayden to offer Esther a position in his cabinet as head of the Department of Aging.

Her post-graduate work was in gerontology, and she was well aware of the elderly's needs. In the early 1970s, as planner for services for the elderly in a five-county area, she helped establish sites where senior citizens could gather daily for meals and social services.

In Wolf, the elderly have found a strong advocate for change.

"I think life is not worth living if you don't have a quality of life that is acceptable to you," she says without hesitation.

Her goal is to change things for the better in others' lives and she zeroes in

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on a number of major issues closest to her heart: the rights of minorities, the elderly, and women.

All three suffer from policies for the aging that have been put together in a haphazard way; policies created under

crisis situations rather than with solid, long-range planning. As a result, she says, "A lot of human pain is involved."

Needs vary greatly among the elderly. Some need the care of a nursing home. Others function well in shared housing or in a home with a support system of family members who may be able to use a senior daycare center during the day when they are working. "What we want and need," she says, "is a system that allows options."

The list of needs Wolf ticks off is substantial, but each contributes to a quality of life that makes living worthwhile.

Senior daycare centers, of which there are far too few, she points out, should be conveniently located and affordable. A trained workpool should be available to primary caregivers so they could occasionally be relieved of their round-the-clock duties. It should be easy to get a "chore" person to come in and fix the leaky faucet, unstick the door.

Clearly, there's a lot to be done. And Wolf attends to it daily with the help of her motivational calendar.

"Every day, there's a different saying—lots of positive reinforcements," says the woman who believes individuals can make a difference—day in and day out.

This is the tenth of an Amway-sponsored series on Americans who are quietly "making a difference."

Esther Wolf, working with the people she loves.



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