



COMPASSION

is the vital link between heartache and hope

BY LYNETTE MAGNINO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE GERMAN

Joanne Hammett, patient advocate at the Sacramento Life Center, possesses a deep sense of concern for the person sitting opposite her in the counseling room: a woman facing a crisis pregnancy.

“They need to feel from us that we are caring and compassionate,” Joanne says of the patients, stressing “it’s not something you can ‘put on’ in

YOUR STORIES MY STORY



some disingenuous attempt to persuade a specific outcome. Rather, authentic concern for these women and their unborn children must be sensed and

known, otherwise “it’s over and they’ve shut down,” she portends.

“They cannot feel judged” about their difficult circumstances or possible leanings toward abortion, she adds. Judgement only serves to close the door on any hope of productive dialogue. “They can be defensive, they’re scared, they’re angry,” she pauses, speaking from the heart and with the unmistakable experience of 20 years in her role. “You just don’t know – it runs the gamut,” she explains. But she does know compassion eases heartache and instills hope.

Active listening comforts

“Active listening is the critical thing,” Joanne insists extending the sage advice of Life Center patient advocates to “anyone who might be in the position” to help an abortion-minded individual. Heartache may stem from distress, uncertainty, relationship issues, or economics, and she believes “letting that person say whatever it is that they need to say out loud, maybe for the very first time,” can help them find clarity.

“They may solve all their own problems without you ever having to say a word,” Joanne says, further endorsing the power of listening. “We don’t have to say a lot. We have to listen more.”

Listening includes encouraging patients to “get it out,” in a non-threatening and supportive environment. “We’re reframing and repeating,” she says indicating a gentleness that allows patients to understand “we’re here to help them.”

Not every Life Center patient contemplates abortion. Joanne explains how the Life Center “casts a very broad net” and “helps a lot of people” including women who are very happy to be pregnant but may not have insurance, or who need a pregnancy verification for MediCal.

