

Nominee Name: Marie “Mickey” Steinitz, MSW, LCSW
Nominated By: Sylvia C. Loumeau, MSW, LCSW

Marie “Mickey” Steinitz, is an amazing person and clinician. For years, Mickey worked in the corporate world, working on computers before personal computers even existed. After some time as a stay-at-home mother and a couple other career changes, Mickey found her calling in school social work, and in particular, working with children. At Catholic Charities she was assigned to a few different schools before she found her “home” at St. Joseph School in Camden, NJ.

St. Joe’s sits in a very low-income, predominantly immigrant neighborhood, where it is not unusual for the children to hear the local gangs shooting it out right outside of their windows and where they are often awakened during the night by the rats crawling across their legs. Ms. Mickey, as she came to be known, eagerly went to St. Joe’s every day for nearly 19 years so she could try to provide some joy and emotional relief to the children who were so deeply wounded by poverty, violence, neglect, substance use and more. She took personal interest in each of the children, would talk seriously with them about their concerns, and she would play with them with her sand tray and array of therapeutic toys.

In Camden, where the dropout rate sits over 50%, Mickey believed in the children’s ability to succeed. Once, when a young man off-handedly mentioned that he wanted to be an engineer, Mickey cut out any article she came across about the varied things engineers could do and would give them to him to try to inspire him. Even after he moved on to high school, she continued to send him these articles. Years later, in the parking lot of her grocery store, Mickey was surprised when a car came to a screeching halt in front of her and out bounded this same young man. He proudly announced that thanks to their work together and her confidence in him as a boy, he had just graduated from college.

Over the years, Mickey came to recognize the healing power play has for children. She has obtained the more specialized training that allows her to communicate with children in the language and medium they understand. She has sat alongside of children so focused that they were drooling into her sand tray as they worked out their emotional issues in the sand. She has watched a new big brother use a giant bat toy to carry away the baby that was buried under the sand, and she has helped children, whose sand tray display had them blocked into a corner as an army of little green soldiers surrounded them, to problem-solve a potential solution.

Sadly, last June, Mickey’s work at Catholic Charities came to a sad end when our contract was not renewed. Leaving the children and the school she had come to love so much has pained her, but like a phoenix, she has reemerged in her own private play therapy practice, where she hopes to inspire a new group of children.