

"Can I please give you a hug because you saved my life?"



Marcia Cherry is referred to as the "Mayor of Solnit." It is easy to understand given her infectious energy and enthusiasm. "I know everyone," she stated. "Coming here is not work. I love what I do."

She is now known as a hero after saving the life of a choking youth.

This is not the first time she has played a critical role in someone's life - this is simply who she is.

While Marcia's career began at the Albert J. Solnit Center South Campus 16 years ago, her dedication to others and compassionate ways started upon high school graduation as her mother asked her to move in with her ailing grandparents.

Marcia's grandmother suffered a broken ankle. She was also unable to read which complicated the administration of pain medication. Marcia developed a system to place the pills inside manila envelopes and drew pictures on each indicating the time of day the dosage should be taken. The morning pills were placed in the "sunshine and coffee" envelope with lunch indicated by a "sandwich" picture and evening was marked with "moon and stars."

When Marcia's grandfather was suffering with terminal cancer, hospice staff taught her how to bring him comfort by giving him morphine. She was constantly by his side.

These experiences influenced Marcia's decision to become a Certified Nurse's Assistant (CNA) in 1997 and she later became a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) in 2004. After finishing nursing school, she worked in a hospital with Alzheimer's patients.

Marcia was encouraged to apply to Solnit South, formerly known as Riverview Hospital, by her sister-in-law who was a Department of Children and Families Social Worker at the time. She never looked back.

Marcia's work started on a unit as a floor nurse. She believes you need to be a "special person" to work at the facility. "This is not for everyone. You must have compassion and be patient," she often tells others.



"I am a mother first," Marcia stated when asked about her approach to the children and youth she serves. Marcia describes "pouring love" she has for her own children into those at Solnit. After all, Marcia started at the facility while her first child was four years old and gave birth to her second child early in her tenure - after a concerning episode. While four months pregnant, she was kicked in the abdomen by a youth during a restraint. Thankfully everyone was alright - there is more to this story.

In testament to her character, Marcia looked beyond this incident and saw a young girl in need and without family support. She later gained permission to mentor this youth upon her discharge. She visited her, took her shopping, bowling and became an active support to this adolescent female. "I was glad I was part of her journey," Marcia stated when speaking proudly of knowing this former resident is now functioning well as a young adult and completed community college.



This "joy" she feels when reaching a child starts with her hands-on approach. "I'm going to get on the floor and talk to them," she stated when she sees a child in need. For one particular young girl who experienced difficulty trusting and talking to others, she sat next to her and they read a poetry book together. "Look beyond their behaviors," is one of her core beliefs.

"Don't quit. Don't give up on our kids," she emphatically stated.

A combination of motherly instincts and training put Marcia in a critical situation one day while giving new employees a tour of the facility. "He's choking," Marcia heard when entering the cafeteria. She quickly asked the other youth sitting at the table to move aside and performed the Heimlich maneuver on an adolescent male while a roomful of youth and staff watched.



Marcia was trained in this technique yet never performed it on a live person. "I didn't even think about it. I just acted," Marcia stated. The technique was successful, and the youth began unobstructed breathing.

The entire cafeteria of youth and staff applauded her efforts. "You saved him from choking," one resident yelled.

"You're my hero and you don't even wear a cape," another told her.

An hour later, the young man saw Marcia in the hallway. "Can I please give you a hug, because you saved my life," he asked her. We all know what happened next.

Since 2019, Marcia has been the Staff Development Coordinator at the facility. She is the first face new employees see upon hire. Diligently, she works to retain new hires, knowing the demands of the job amidst a national nursing shortage.

Marcia speaks highly of the dedication of those who work at Solnit South. "We all stuck together a team," when describing the efforts at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. At one point, she was working from 6:30 a.m. until 10:30 p.m. to take temperatures of staff entering the building.

Marcia is continuing her education, parenting two children, managing a family and yes, making sure "King" her pit bull has all his needs met.

What does Marcia say to others when describing the youth at the facility? "You have to get to know them for yourself. They can be so terrible on paper," she stated. "We are here for the kids. Look beyond the behavior."

"The kids come first."

"God put me here for a reason," she speaks of her journey to Solnit South and her experiences.

Thank you, Marcia Cherry, for all you give to each and every one of us!

