

IHMs in Action: Casa Hope

"Casa Hope," in Houston, Texas, is a haven for children in crisis through abuse, neglect or life-threatening illnesses such as AIDS.

Patricia (Helen Mary) Aseltyne, IHM, has ministered at this licensed foster care and adoption agency for more than 12 years. She was instrumental in establishing Casa Hope's Hospice House and has been a house parent for Casa's family-based homes. Sister Pat has also served as caregiver to infants with AIDS and foster mother to Baby Rosa, who died of the disease at age 3.



When Alexis (left) was adopted through Casa Hope, she and her mother asked Sister Pat to be her godmother.

"So many of Casa's families are touched by AIDS with its stigma and isolation," Sister Pat notes. "Part of my role has been to let the children and families know they're not alone, either by caring for a child in need or by helping with little things to make a family more comfortable, such as a bus pass or paying a utility bill."

Sister Pat currently provides aftercare/outreach when children are discharged from Casa and return to their families.

"Within a month of a child's discharge, I meet with the family to see how things are going," she says. "I try to affirm the parents for the positive things they're doing, but my priority at all times is to be sure the child is safe."

"The outreach program has been extremely successful. Many parents ask that it be extended beyond the six-month mandatory visit schedule," she asserts.

Sister Pat's outreach efforts have also included working with victims of Hurricane Katrina who fled to Houston from New Orleans.

"I'm still working with a family that's in a real 'catch-22,'" she notes. "The grandparents are caring for seven children and are still in desperate need of social services. They can't access those services because no one in the family has any identification. We're trying to help them with the tangle of paperwork and legal demands."

Although the caseload continues to grow, Sister Pat says that everyone involved with Casa Hope is intent on helping those who call on them. "It's a privilege," she says simply.