

## IHMs in Action

When Candyce (Lauren) Rekart, IHM, went to Puerto Rico in 1972, she had no idea how long her ministry would last.



Sister Candy (center), with doctoral students Lydia Lazaro (left) and Johanna Ortiz.

She's still there, 34 years later. For the last nine years, she's ministered in a mental health clinic within a small university. Her clients are adults, adolescents and children - all of whom are survivors of sexual abuse.

"I love my work," Sister Candy says emphatically. "Not the violence that inspires the acts of sexual abuse, but seeing the courage of the survivors is incredible - the courage it took to live on, and also the courage to seek help, to talk about their experiences and to heal from them."

The psychological services provided at the clinic are free, thanks to a grant from the Justice Department of Puerto Rico in conjunction with federal funds. The program has trained more than 300 doctoral students in the area of sexual abuse.

"Because we've trained so many people, many psychologists know about us. We get lots of referrals and consultations, and we serve the whole island," explains Sister Candy. "Many clients are impoverished, but they are willing to travel distances, sometimes on public transportation after work, in order to get the help they need."

Because of the nature of the trauma experienced by those to whom she ministers, Sister Candy notes that treatment is often long-term - anywhere from months to years.

She tells the story of a six-year-old girl she treated several years ago, who often chose to color during play therapy sessions. The child, whose life was very chaotic at the time, became extremely upset if she colored outside the lines.

"I used to just redraw the lines for her and reframe the picture encouraging her to see potential beyond the limits," recalls Sister Candy. "I ran into her not long ago. She's a teenager now, but she told me that those sessions had a profound effect on her."

"She said that redrawing the lines of an established picture showed her that one way or another one can look for solutions, even if the solutions are not the ones you expected."

"There is great satisfaction in accompanying people in their journey to find their own inner strengths," Sister Candy says.