



Extraordinary Women

By [Barbara Brown](#), Resource Specialist

In a neat white house, in a quiet neighborhood of Two Rivers, Wisconsin, two extraordinary women have been running a busy household for over 35 years. They have fostered over 84 children, as well as cared for adults who cannot care for themselves.

Now in their 80s, they are still busy providing a comfortable, loving home for both children and adults. They still have a houseful with three children with special needs and two adults with serious handicaps.

Who are these women? Sister Mary Edmund and Sister Mary Irmina, two Catholic nuns of the order of St. Francis of Stevens Point.

With smiles and jokes, they share their history of fostering. They were working in a small hospital, and when it closed, the idea to foster children took root.

Sister Edmund was a medical records specialist and Sister Irmina was the dietician for the hospital. They approached their convent with their plan, got approval, and applied for licensure to be a foster home in Manitowoc County.

To begin, they did not specialize in children who had multiple physical and mental handicaps. Their arms were open to children who needed to be fostered. Over the years, they have come to specialize in the challenging task of caring for children and adults with disabilities.

Their walls are covered with pictures of all of the children they have fostered. The stories of these kids are told with warmth and are touching to the heart.

They told about a six-year-old boy they currently have in care. When he came to them, they were told that he may need a feeding tube and would never be able to walk. Through perseverance, they worked with him to develop his skills, and he now feeds himself and walks with assistance. They are hoping to see him adopted.

Another is the story of Mary Jo, a child they have raised since infancy. She was part of their home for 18 years until Mary Jo had to move because of licensing regulations concerning the capacity of adult and children homes. They still talk longingly about her and treasure the weekends when she comes to stay with them.

Without complaint, they talk about setting the alarm to get up every two hours of every night to check the children because of their physical needs. They have been doing this for years.

When asked what is the most challenging part of fostering, both agree that separation is the most difficult. The separations that occur when children are adopted or returned to their birth families. And even the separation that may occur when a child dies. They recently experienced the death of one boy who was seriously ill, and who was part of their family for eight years. The Sisters have said "good-bye" to many children over these years. They acknowledge that this is an inherent part of fostering.

Currently, there are eight part-time assistants working with them to bathe, feed, and care for the children and the adults. Their home has special equipment and handicapped bathing facilities.

They are very grateful for the pediatrician who has made house calls for 30 years. He is now retiring, and they are not sure they can find another physician so generous with his time and service. They also have a neurologist who comes to their home every six weeks. A dentist provides services in their home twice a year.

With wistful smiles and a glance at the other, they voice their concern about finding replacements when they can no longer care for their family. Some have tried, and the task was too much for them.

In the meantime, they continue their extraordinary work with cheer and constancy in their cozy white house on a quiet street. It is nice to know that there are people like this in our world.