Barbara R. Frankel

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When Barbara Frankel talks about her work she makes a huge fan with both hands. She weighs the left hand and then the right. “I like to see the big pictures as part of the whole,” she says, “people’s struggles and also the realities that they face.”

For two decades, Frankel has directed the University’s Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) Program at Craft Cottage, a small white clapboard house in the middle of campus. Nearly 5,000 clients from the Greater Seacoast Community have been served there, and, because services are offered on a sliding scale, no one is turned away. Consequently, students in the MFT master’s degree program encounter a wide range of client circumstances during their 500 hours of supervised clinical practice. Frankel, known as both a gifted clinician and supervisor, has guided the educations of more than 120 master’s degree graduates.

“I believe in resilience,” Frankel says. “I embrace the idea that we can take struggle and pain and transform it into hope and change. That’s our work here.”

Frankel, always a systems thinker, chaired the New Hampshire legislative committee to create a coalition of all master’s level mental health professionals in the state. She is credited in large part for the state legislature’s approval of licensure for MFT therapists in 1994. As a result, the public is assured of quality care by licensed MFT professionals and services are covered by insurance.

Clinical Associate Professor Mark Moses notes: “Barbara’s commitment to the growth of MFTs is a constant inspiration… She has been the visionary, catalyst, and implementer of initiatives that are now legacies.”

Frankel’s ability to envision and then build solutions is evident in her founding of The Birchtree Center in Portsmouth, N.H., in 2002, to “help children and youth with autism grow and flourish in their families and communities.” When her son was diagnosed with autism as an infant and needed specialized treatment and education unavailable in the state, Frankel founded the center.

Initially the center served just three children. Now with a staff of 45, it serves 29 students year-round, and each year, more than 200 persons are helped through education, outreach, and events.

Her son Elliott is a recent graduate of the center, and says Frankel, “He’s taught me more wisdom than anything in my life.”

—Carrie Sherman