

2016 Distinguished Alumna Award

Mary Kay Ketter Carle '61

"I never felt that I was 'smart' when I was a student at Saint Ben's, because there were so many bright girls," recalls Mary Kay Ketter Carle '61. "But the sisters seemed to understand there was more to a person than just their intelligence. And I appreciated that. They were very compassionate, observant and encouraging of my individual talents."

Equipped with the compassion and encouragement she experienced and the intelligence she most certainly possessed, Mary Kay graduated from Saint Ben's and went on to impact early childhood education and psychotherapy in ways that are still felt today.

In her first year out of college, Mary Kay joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corp and taught indigenous children in Alaska. Later in her career she joined a team of educators to develop a pilot program for early childhood/family education (ECFE) and implemented it in the St. Cloud school district. The program, supported by funding from the Busch and Kellogg Foundations, was disseminated nationally and became the standard for early childhood programs. Mary Kay and her co-workers helped implement the program in school districts nationwide.

"The reason I think the program was so successful was because it promoted understanding children from their point of view," she explains. "I did a lot of observing of children, and by cueing into their needs I was able to respond to them in ways that taught parents and teachers to appreciate, listen and respect the individual need of each child."

Mary Kay went on to earn her master's degree from St. Cloud State University and obtain her Minnesota license as an independent clinical social worker and marriage and family therapist. In 1974, she and her husband Dan (SJU '61) founded the first privately licensed Rule 29 mental health clinic in St. Cloud. Rule 29 establishes standards for community mental health centers and clinics in Minnesota. Their Center for Family Counseling grew to include 15 psychotherapists, and Mary Kay and Dan went on to pioneer clinical methods in family therapy and the use of a one-way mirror when working with parents and children.

Throughout her career, Mary Kay has had a passion for the advancement of women and children's issues. "I think the inspiration has come from being with other women throughout the years and experiencing their wisdom and their compassion for people," she says.

In addition to dedicating her time to organizations such as Anna Marie's Alliance, the Forum of Executive Women and the League of Women Voters, Mary Kay became a regional coordinator for Gather the Women in 2007. Gather the Women is a global network of women and women's organizations who share a belief that the time is now to activate the incredible power of women's wisdom on a planetary scale.

As a volunteer through Hands Across the World, Mary Kay teaches English as a second language and computer skills to help immigrants navigate their new American homes. She served as a board member for Childcare Resources and Independent School District 742's ECFE programs, and as a regional consultant for St. Cloud Area Head Start. Currently Mary Kay is on the advisory board for Saint Benedict's Monastery and serves as CSB class of 1961 representative.

Years ago, the sisters of Saint Benedict's Monastery recognized Mary Kay as a student for more than her GPA. "I really feel that they honored me as a unique individual," she says. "And I think that has helped me to honor myself for the person I am today."