

KAREN GRIMSICH



Karen Grimsich is currently is the Administrator for Aging and Family Services (AFS), a division of the City of Fremont Human Services Department. She has a Bachelors degree from Monterey Institute of International Studies and a Masters degree in Public Health (MPH) from the University of California, Berkeley. She manages a division with 25 staff and over 200 senior volunteers and interns, and a \$5 million budget. The programs under her supervision include Age Well Centers, case management, caregiver support, senior peer counseling, in-home geriatric mental health team, and health promotion team.

We honor you, Karen as a phenomenal woman in Behavioral Health!



What motivated you to pursue a career in behavioral health?

When I first started working at the City of Fremont, the City had just been awarded a program expansion to provide mental health services to older adults living in South County. It was fun to get the program started and see the positive response from the community. We were able to have counselors visit older adults in their homes for the first time, which made a huge impact since they were very isolated, and it was difficult to access services.

How has the behavioral health culture changed for women in the field during your time in the profession?

Aging is fundamentally a woman's issue. Women live longer – often on very low, fixed incomes – and women also provide the majority of supportive caregiving in our country. With the changing in our demographics - more people living longer, and living longer with complex health conditions – there are more and more older women who need emotional support.

Was there another woman/mentor/figure that inspired you in your work? If so, who was it and why did she inspire you?

My good friend's mother owned several residential care homes for the elderly when I was growing up. As teenagers, we would help at the homes. Sheri created loving, nurturing environments at each home and I fell in love with the kindness and stories of the residents.

What impact have women had on behavioral health in the way we provide service?

My background is in public health so I have a broad view of how our mind, body and spirit are connected and how we need to support and accept the interdependence of aging together in community. I think the female perspective fundamentally understands our need for 'community', which is a value that creates wellness.

What changes have you seen in behavioral health because of women "shaking the table"?

I have seen a change in acceptance that the goal in wellness can be one of interdependence, especially for older adults. That aging in community is valued. I think this is because more women are involved in designing programs.

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