

Alice Kitchen, Kansas City's tireless advocate for women and children, dies at 83

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Alice Kitchen, center, protests outside the Kansas City Gun Show on February 13, 2016. Kitchen made it her mission to advocate for the metro's women and children, both in her professional life and in volunteer roles.

A champion of women and children's rights, Kitchen is remembered by those who knew her as someone who never gave up on a cause. Throughout her career, she has won many awards for her activism and gained recognition from the White House for her work.

Alice Kitchen, a local activist known for her advocacy for women and children's rights, died on Friday. She was 83 years old.

According to religious institute [The Loretto Community](#), of which Kitchen was a co-member, she died surrounded by family at St. Luke's Hospice House in Kansas City.

Kitchen dedicated decades of her life to advocating for people who often went ignored. She served as [director of social services](#) for Children's Mercy Hospital for many years, and sat on several boards and committees [serving marginalized communities](#).

Bonnie Cowherd first met Kitchen in the 1990s, when they were both on a community taskforce that helped mothers who lost or were at risk of losing custody of their children due to drug use and housing issues.

Alongside other community members, they established [Amethyst Place](#), a supportive housing program that has served mothers and children for 25 years.

Cowherd worked with Kitchen on that board for more than a decade, strategizing and dreaming with her. She remembers Kitchen as a force to be reckoned with, who was never afraid of asking for what she wanted.



Amethyst Place

Alice Kitchen was honored by the White House for her advocacy.

“If she came to ask me for something, it was kind of like a two-sided sword,” said Cowherd. “It meant she believed I could do it, but it also meant she wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

Cowherd saw Kitchen the day before she died. She remembered mourning the loss of such an important voice in Kansas City, but feeling hopeful about the legacy she left.

“There was some sadness about, ‘Gosh, that force is going to be missed,’” said Cowherd. “And I thought, ah, no, she’s lit enough fires under enough other people in Kansas City, it’ll keep going.”



Courtesy Jill Katz

Alice Kitchen, pictured in the 1960s during her time spent with the Sisters of Social Service in Encino, California, an experience she says shaped her life's work.

Though Kitchen worked in social services at Children’s Mercy Hospital, those close to her described her as someone whose work extended far beyond that job, and never stopped.

Jill Katz, Kitchen’s niece, says her family talks about how Kitchen was apparently born within 30 minutes of labor, which they think reflects how she navigated life.

“That characterization has followed her throughout her life,” said Katz. “And that is so true. She doesn't stop. She keeps going, and she doesn't hesitate to push you.”

Katz remembers her as the “cool aunt” who made individual connections with her nieces and nephews. She says Kitchen always saw strengths in people before they did, and pushed them to foster those strengths.

That was especially apparent when Kitchen signed Katz up for the National Association of Social Workers' Missouri chapter when she was in high school or college, despite Katz never showing any intention of pursuing that career.

Katz joked that that was the one time Kitchen took no for an answer, because Katz went on to become an attorney, instead. But she took her aunt's teachings to that path, too,

“She taught me how to be an advocate and to really just get out there with my boots on the ground,” said Katz, who has since become a therapist.



Courtesy Jill Katz

A photo from Alice's wedding to her husband, Ron Kitchen, in October 1975. Ron died in 1997. Alice's family remembers their relationship as a model of true love and partnership.

Jane McQueeney worked with Kitchen on the [Kansas City Human Rights Commission](#), when Kitchen was chair of the Task Force on Gender Equity.

One of her most poignant memories of Kitchen was when McQueeney worked for the federal government and was paid less because of her gender. Kitchen [worked to get Kansas City to adopt an ordinance](#) to prohibit discrimination against women and stop employers from penalizing women with less work experience.

“I went down and gave testimony when the city council considered that ordinance, and it was all spearheaded by Alice,” said McQueeney. “She just was absolutely fearless in her convictions.”

McQueeney says Kitchen was determined to fight for justice for those who couldn’t fight their battles on their own. She says in their time working together, McQueeney would sometimes get tired and feel ready to give up, but Kitchen never quit.

“She fought her entire career for our community. She made me a better person, and I’m going to miss her terribly,” McQueeney said.

Kitchen’s loved ones are planning a public ceremony honoring her memory, featuring speakers from the Kansas City community, but details are still pending.