



ISSUE 1 • MARCH 2020

WOMEN OF THE STREET-BASED SEX TRADE

Helping women involved in the street-based sex trade is a complex issue affecting residents, businesses and the community. Women may be in the sex trade because someone is coercing them (sex trafficking). Other women trade sex due to circumstances including poverty, homelessness and drug addiction. Women in street-based sex work face high rates of victimization:

- Homicide
- Violent Crime
- Sexual Assault
- Sex Trafficking

SERVICES WE PROVIDE

The Sisters Program includes both our drop in centers on the north and south sides of Milwaukee as well as outreach services. *Drop in services include hot meals, showers, resources, counseling, case management and support groups.*



Sisters Program's outreach van

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ABOUT US

The goal of the **Sisters Program** is to create a citywide policy to provide a public health based approach to helping women in the street based sex trade/trafficking victims rather than criminalizing their actions.

When the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) diverts women to the Sisters Program instead of a ticket, fine or incarceration, women have the opportunity to change their lives and the lives of their family/children; and avoid future incarceration, fines or other judgments made by the criminal justice system.

SISTERS PROGRAM SOUTH COLLABORATORS

Ascension Lutheran Church (ELCA)
 Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
 Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa
 School Sisters of Notre Dame
 School Sisters of St. Francis
 Sisters of Charity of St. Joan Antida
 Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi
 Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis

CONTACT INFORMATION

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 Milwaukee, WI | (414) 346-4406

For more information please contact the Benedict Center's main office at **414-347-1774** or visit our website at www.benedictcenter.org.

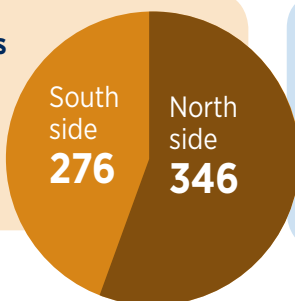


FROM THE DESK OF THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR, MELINDA HUGHES

Each day at the Sisters Program we are seeking to actualize our Mission of greater safety and wellbeing for our clients- women involved in the street-based sex trade. Our clients have experienced multiple layers of hurt,

neglect, stigma, oppression and abandonment both in the past, and often more recently. Over half of our clients have no housing, or no safe housing, and they rely on our outreach specialists and drop-in center staff for a wide variety of needs. Bus tickets, clothing, meals, hygiene supplies, showers, a safe place to rest, warm jackets in the winter, the list goes on. We couldn't offer these resources without the amazing support of a community of donors and supporters.

622 contacts
with women
working on
the streets:



In one year:

248 hot breakfasts
196 hot lunches
3,000+ bag lunches

Sisters Program Achievements

In 2019 our street outreach specialists made 622 contacts with women working on the streets: 346 on the North side and 276 on the South side. In a year's time, we offered approximately 248 hot breakfasts and 196 hot lunches, plus over 3,000 bag lunches distributed by outreach and our drop-in staff. With our Warming Room operating during the coldest months, through invitations and word of mouth, we had 171 unique visitors to our drop in center, for a total of 2,293 visits. We further provided 84 hot dinners for up to 720 overnight stays over the winter months. The Program remains a trusted resource to our clients.

Responding to the homelessness of our clients, we worked in partnership with the Housing Division to fund a full-time housing navigator for our Program. With her help we have greatly accelerated securing safe housing for our clients! And we are very excited to have secured funding to re-open a North side drop in center, coming February 2020. Our North side clients are eager to have a full drop in center in their community, and we are eager to be back!

Each day we have the honor of facilitating the steps of progress—clients who acknowledge it's time to begin detox or start the

process toward inpatient treatment, clients who work with our housing navigator to achieve the milestone of safe housing, clients who are working on finding employment or on enrolling in GED classes.

And each day we are assisting and supporting clients in the midst of heartbreak and trauma—clients who lost a friend overnight to overdose, clients who have been beaten and assaulted by partners or customers, clients who were excited to hear about an opening for an apartment only to be crushed that the landlord said no, due to their past record. In truth, the healing path for our clients is one that requires a patchwork quilt of multiple supports, available consistently over time.

Our clients are survivors—amazingly resilient in the face of the harshest of circumstances: barriers to services and service providers.

As we work toward helping each client overcome those barriers, we remember some key healing truths:

- In order to **heal abuse**, we need to **restore a sense of safety**.
- To **heal neglect**, we need to **experience compassionate attention**.
- To **heal stigma**, we must **release shame and reclaim dignity**.
- And to **heal abandonment**, we need to **experience loving connection and belonging**.

To that end, I am continuously in awe of the power of small acts of kindness. The power of a home-cooked meal. The power of a hand-woven scarf. The power of a hug. The power of laughing together. Of dancing. The power of really feeling heard.

*To connect with Melinda,
feel free to reach out via email:
mhughes@benedictcenter.org.*



CLIENT CORNER

SISTERS STORY OF THE MONTH

In the past six months our special Sister of the Month has made huge strides in helping herself and her child live healthier, happier lives. She has been involved in case management services, housing navigation and general drop in center care. Before coming to Sisters, she struggled to meet the basic necessities of survival on the streets. "I didn't know where my next shower, meal, or bed was going to be. I didn't feel safe. I was using." Since coming to Sisters she has had her healthy baby, is working on housing and reconnecting with family, and creating a healthier environment for herself. One lesson she hopes everyone at the Sisters program learns is that "everyone has a soft side and there is always a way forward with the help of the awesome Sisters staff."

"...everyone has a soft side and there is always a way forward with the help of the awesome Sisters staff."



Sisters newest staff member, Teresa, advocates for sexual assault victims.

MEET NEW SISTERS STAFF

Teresa

Teresa is our new Sexual Assault Advocate. She does case management which includes building life skills, referrals to community services/follow up services. She will assist with Social Security/Housing Needs in addition to her work as a sexual assault advocate. Teresa hopes to help connect clients to one-on-one counseling, family counseling, employment opportunities, health and wellness connections, as well as reconnecting families.

Before joining the Sisters staff she worked as a life skills coach/advocate. Teresa also has experience with W-2/Criminal justice and Department of Human Services case management. She also worked as a Social Security advocate.

Three words that describe her are: "caring, honest and kind."

If she could travel anywhere in the world she would fly to the Caribbean Islands.

Outside of work you can find her spending time with family, playing basketball or cooking.

Her personal motto is "Treat people like you want to be treated."



WISH LIST *The women need the following items:* • Coats all sizes, especially XL-XXL • Socks • Towels • Toothbrush/toothpaste • Mouthwash • Travel size hygiene products (ie: shampoo, soap) • Feminine napkins & tampons • Deodorant • Toilet paper • Wet wipes individually wrapped • Reading glasses various strengths • "colorful fabrics" for art therapy (see back page for more info)



Benedict Center

Compassion • Justice • Action • Transformation

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CLIENT ART THERAPY CORNER



The Sisters Program is seeking donations of colorful fabrics to transform into journal covers. The transformation journals will be given to clients and sold to raise funds for our Creative Healing workshops. Fabrics can be mailed or dropped off at our Sisters South location.