

CONNECTING WITH THE FRIENDS OF THE BENEDICT CENTER

“Listen and attend with the ear of your heart.”
— Saint Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*

SISTERS PROGRAM EXPANDS

Between 2012 and 2014, the Benedict Center implemented the Sisters Program pilot project. The project featured a collaboration with the Milwaukee County District Attorney’s Office and Milwaukee police by offering a diversion option for women arrested or cited for prostitution.

The pilot’s positive results justified establishment of a permanent Sisters Program in Milwaukee’s Police District 3. Beginning in 2017, the Sisters Program expanded to the south side.

Leader in Innovation

Prostitution has been a long-standing problem in Milwaukee, concentrated along Lisbon and North avenues in Police District 3 on the north side and National, Lincoln and Greenfield avenues in Police District 2 on the south side. Over a three-year period, 704 women were arrested in Milwaukee 1,292 times, with 83% of those arrests in Districts 2 and 3, per data provided by the Benedict Center.

In other words, prostitution and arrest are a revolving door.

The Sisters Program is predicated on the belief that the traditional cycle of arrest, incarceration and a return to the streets doesn’t pro-

vide long-term solutions to the problem of prostitution. The program intends to break that cycle by giving women access to services and resources that lead to a safer and healthier life.

The program is gender-responsive. It is designed to address the specific needs of women, such as trauma caused by physical and sexual abuse, the need to care for their children, mental and physical health issues, a lack of safe housing and more.

Trauma-informed care provides services and resources that are sensitive to the impact trauma has had on the women.

Harm reduction approach provides women a place that will meet women where they are and work with them to improve their health and safety, even if they are still using drugs or trading sex. Change does not happen overnight, and

the women themselves set goals and progress as they are ready and able to do so in a realistic way. For many women, obtaining safe housing, food, clothing, mental health, and/or medical care are paramount and necessary to success in leaving prostitution.

According to an evaluation by the Medical College of Wisconsin, this innovative approach has had success. During the pilot program on the city’s north side, 45 women accepted the option of participating in the Sisters Project rather than being ticketed, fined or possibly incarcerated on a charge of prostitution. Of these, 71% completed the program and remained involved beyond the mandated six-month minimum. Twenty-one percent reported quitting the streets for at least a month or more after one year.

It takes a village

According to Jeanne Geraci, Executive Director of the Benedict Center, prostitution impacts the community, so the Sisters Program is rooted in a multi-disciplinary team of residents, businesses, faith leaders, and community development organizations. The program’s expansion



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FRIENDS HELP BENEDICT CENTER CELEBRATE

The Benedict Center is earning a national profile for its innovative approach to reducing recidivism and improving the lives of women who have come into conflict with the law.

On a local level, the Benedict Center is becoming better known as a resource to the police, the Milwaukee District Attorney's Office and communities.

As feasible, the Benedict Center is adding staff to handle the growing demands for programs and services. Existing staff are wrestling with heavier workloads.

Friends of the Benedict Center has responded by volunteering in ways that allow staff to focus on their core mission.

For example, Friends continues to provide the food and service for three of the Center's quarterly awards luncheons.

This past November, Friends filled the breach when the Benedict Center



Friends Board members (l-r) — Terry Sherman, Angie Kopf, Monica Beitzel, Cathy Fink, Rosemary Cavaluzzi and Barbara Kutchera.

needed assistance with the combined awards luncheon/Thanksgiving dinner.

We also provided the food, some gifts, decorations and assistance with games at the Center's Christmas party.

As the Benedict Center works to serve its expanded mission on the south

side, Friends will explore ways it can assist with projects and fulfill needs that help enhance the experience of both clients and staff.

Over the coming months, we will alert you to opportunities for volunteering, providing an in-kind donation or otherwise supporting the work of the Benedict Center.

Any assistance — time, talent, or resources — will be hugely appreciated.



Marine Toys for Tots blessed the Benedict Center Christmas Party with a huge selection of toys for the clients' children. Shown l-r: Cindy Nicholson, BC Development Director; James Kennedy, MATC GED Instructor; Marine Sovaja Knox.

FOCUS ON FRIENDS

Focus on Friends newsletter is published three times per year by the Friends of the Benedict Center.

Articles and ideas are welcome.

If you have any questions or comments about an issue, or have an idea for a future issue, please contact:

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to the south side has been in the works for two years as local residents, businesses, churches, and other entities partnered to address the growing issue.

According to a November article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* The Benedict Center and its partners have raised \$500,000 to establish a Sisters Program drop-in center on the south side, similar to the one that exists on the north side. The money will also cover an estimated three years of operating expenses. A location has been identified, and the facility is being furnished.¹

In addition to police referrals, clients at the drop-in center will come from the center's outreach program. Women who come to the center will find respite from the dangers of the street, help in developing a safety plan, opportunities to participate in support groups and case management to ensure they maximize their experience with the Benedict Center.

New growth, new needs

The Benedict Center has found that expanding its services to the south side is demanding and exciting at once.

The Sisters Program exists because of



Donna Heitpas' tireless commitment, leadership, and sacrifice of Donna Heitpas, Sisters Program Director. After years of service to the Benedict Center, Donna decided to retire in November, 2016.

In August, Arnitta Holliman joined the Benedict Center as the new director and helped facilitate a smooth transition. A native of Milwaukee, she holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a minor in Criminology and Law Studies from Marquette University. Her Master of Science degree in Clinical Psychology was also earned at Marquette. An educator, counselor, and public speaker, Arnitta is on the adjunct

faculties of Milwaukee Area Technical College and Marquette University.

Mary Rinnert, APSW, is another new face at the Benedict Center. A certified social worker, she serves as Coordinator of Deferred Prosecution Monitoring for the Women's Harm Reduction Program.

The Benedict Center staff is also expanding with six new staff to support the two Sisters Program drop-in centers and street outreach.



Arnitta Holliman

¹ Lutheran, Ashley. "Benedict Center partners to expand diversion effort to south side." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. November 18, 2016.

FRIENDS FULFILL 2016 PLEDGE TO THE BENEDICT CENTER

In over 25 years of service, Friends of the Benedict Center has never lost sight of its core mission to provide the Benedict Center with financial and volunteer support, as well as donations of needed items.

Driving that support is a shared commitment to helping women who have come into conflict with the justice system reclaim their futures through education, alcohol, drug abuse and mental

health counseling, as well as the development of personal and financial skills.

In 2016, Friends donated \$1,600 to the Sisters Program, \$8,400 to the Benedict Center in general; and \$250* to further defray the cost of the Center's move to Dr. Martin Luther King Drive.

In addition, we donated the food and decorations for the Thanksgiving lunch-

*\$6,400 was contributed in 2015

eon and Christmas party, a stove for the Sisters Program north side facility, as well as countless contributions of winter outerwear, toiletries, groceries and more.

Of course, this accounting doesn't begin to recognize the financial donations of Friends made directly to the Benedict Center. Your devotion and generosity continue to amaze. Thank you for all you do.

PAT NETZOW JOINS BOARD

Friends of the Benedict Center is pleased to welcome Patricia Netzow to the Friends Board. Pat is rejoining the board after an absence of several years. She previously served as social chair-woman and spearheaded facilitation of the spring and winter luncheons.



Pat Netzow

IN PRAISE OF UNDIE SUNDAY

Started four years ago as a men’s underwear collection for the Guest House,

St. Matthew’s Evangelical Lutheran’s (Wauwatosa) Undie Sunday expanded to include women’s undergarments for the Friends of the Benedict Center Sisters Program in 2015.

According to Darla Hium — Friends of the Benedict Center Board and St. Matthew’s member — Undie Sunday is a favorite collection drive at St. Matt’s. Each year, members wait to see how the collection will be kicked off.

This year, “Adam and Eve” attended St. Matthew’s, bit the forbidden fruit, realized they needed underwear and that the clients of the Guest House and Benedict Center were in need, also. They encouraged St. Matthew’s members to donate men’s and women’s underwear, socks and pajamas for these programs.

This year’s drive broke new records! Thanks to the generosity of church members, over 402 men’s briefs, 32 t-shirts, 274 pairs of men’s socks, nine women’s pajama sets, 33 pairs of women’s socks, 83 bras and 206 women’s briefs were collected over a two-week period.



On Dec. 10, Darla Hium delivered four large bags to the Benedict Center office. “We have a lot of fun with Undie Sunday,” Hium said. “People often don’t realize that basic needs, like undergarments, often go unmet. It’s rewarding to help provide for basic needs.”

Undie Sunday is just one idea to help women. The Benedict Center is also in need of travel size toiletries, bus passes, groceries and more. You can help by organizing a local fundraiser to help these needs.

TO TAKE ACTION...

To learn more about volunteering, fundraising or assisting with Friends projects, please contact Camille at camilleshawski@gmail.com.

ROC (RESTORE OUR COMMUNITIES): WISCONSIN NEWS

Every year Wisconsin incarcerates thousands of individuals for rule violations related to Extended Supervision, Parole or Probation. In 2015, one in three persons who were incarcerated in Wisconsin were put in prison for a **revocation without a new conviction**. For these 2,954 people the average length of imprisonment was 1.5 years, costing the state \$147 million.

While the financial cost can be calculated, the collateral damages suffered by the individuals, families and communities often go unmentioned. Children

of these individuals are more likely to struggle with mental health and substance abuse. While the family’s financial stability suffers, homelessness increases and children’s academic performance worsens. Communities suffer when individuals who are not convicted of new crimes are incarcerated. A 2016 Health Impact Assessment by Human Impact Partners titled “Excessive Revocations in Wisconsin: The Health Impact of Locking People Up Without a New Conviction” discusses these costs.

The report also covers the rules of su-

pervision as well as supervision and revocation processes in Wisconsin. More effective responses can improve supervision outcomes and reduce recidivism. The report offers suggestions as to how to improve current practices.

To read the full report, go to: www.sentback.org.

Terry Sherman

