

United Nations Activities

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TRAUMA AND DRUG RECOVERY FOR ABUSE AND PROSTITUTE SURVIVORS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

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My name is Norma Hotaling and I am the co-founder of the First Offender Prostitution Program and Executive Director and Founder of the Standing Against Global Exploitation Project, Inc (SAGE). The First Offender Prostitution Program and SAGE was awarded the 1998 Innovations in American Government from the JFK School of Government at Harvard, and the Ford Foundation for the programs that we have created for women and girls who are victims of violence in the criminal justice system.

SAGE is organized by and for survivors of abuse, prostitution and trauma (most of the staff have had criminal histories, severe drug addictions, and were formerly homeless,) and within our various programs, we counsel over 350 women and girls per week. Interwoven in the staff are peer and drug treatment counselors, therapists, acupuncturists and social work and therapist interns. The personal knowledge and experience possessed by many of the staff enables us to effectively provide support and engender trust without re-traumatizing even the most fragile of clients. Through advocacy, educational programs, and as a direct service provider, SAGE has assisted in raising public awareness concerning the sexual exploitation of women and girls. SAGE's direct service programs often focus on the most exploited victims who are therefore the highest users of the medical, social, mental health, and criminal justice systems. As a result of our interventions, SAGE has assisted over 700 women and girls in exiting the criminal justice system, escaping prostitution, recover from abuse and acquire appropriate services such as medical and mental health care, substance abuse treatment, case management, educational and vocational training.

SAGE is a unique collaboration between law enforcement, public health and private agencies created to shift local government's approach to prostitution, aiding women and girls to permanently exit the criminal justice system. SAGE is a dynamic departure from the previous practice of revolving door arrests of prostitutes with little or no services for women and girls. The former approach resulted in extremely high recidivism rates (80% of prostitutes arrested are repeat offenders), continuing sexual exploitation and violence, and enormous costs to the criminal justice and public health systems. Because the average age of entry into prostitution is 13-14, the issue is not only one of violence against women but also the sexual abuse of children and trafficking in young girls.

Everyday in densely populated, urban areas girls of color, ages 12-17 are lured from our local high schools by violent pimps. Poor and vulnerable Asian and Russian women and girls are smuggled, raped, tricked and coerced by traffickers and organized crime syndicates into the highly invisible, and mobile sex trade that includes strip clubs, escort, massage parlors, brothels and street prostitution. Vulnerable and naive 13 and 14 year old blond, blue eye, white girls are brutally and cunningly recruited from our schools, streets, shopping malls of the mid-west and Canada and delivered to major cities all through the US to fill the demand side of prostitution: comprised mostly of educated, middle and upper class men.

In prostitution we witness the fragility of the human mind. We see it brutally manipulated and molded to serve the purposes of perpetrators. Universally we experience the victims being targeted, blamed and punished.

Vanessa who came to us at eighteen said "My pimp knocked me out with a base ball bat. I woke up and he was sewing my head up. He wouldn't even take me to the hospital. How could I get away? He'd kill me first, besides he was all I knew. I had been with him since I was 12."

Through SAGE we shed light on a subject that thrives in darkness, secrecy and silence and shame.

I work with the extraordinarily dedicated team who comprise SAGE and I, founded this venture because 11 years ago this month, I was exiting the criminal justice system. I had been going to juvenile halls, jails, psychiatric hospitals, emergency rooms and drug treatment programs since I was 12. No one ever asked me about my life, about prostitution, being beaten, raped or kidnapped. I was just a whore, a criminal. How could I get out? No one ever treated me like a person. No one asked me if I hurt or why.

Like 90% of our clients
I experienced sexual abuse including child prostitution
Like 82%, I had been brutally assaulted
Like 84% I had been homeless

Like most of my clients, I suffered severe symptoms of PTSD and I desperately wanted to get out of prostitution and a life that made no sense to me.

Women and girls like myself, if untreated cycle endlessly, most often until they die, through medical, mental, social services, criminal justice systems as high users, costing cities billions.

SF is the first jurisdiction to ever focus its law enforcement efforts on the demand side of prostitution. The First Offender Prostitution Program (FOPP) of which I am the co-founder with the SF Police Department, and the SF District Attorney's Office has diverted over 3000 customers of prostitutes from the court system to an educational and rehabilitation experience in lieu of criminal prosecution. 98% of the 3000 men remain arrest free. Fees collected from these men fund a full range of services to women and girls who are the real victims of prostitution and sexual exploitation.

Wrap around services for women and girls include:

- prevention
- early intervention
- crisis care
- mentorship
- individual therapy
- language skills
- legal advocacy
- health care
- housing.

Treatment is provided to women such as Kristine, a former SAGE client who now works at SAGE as the Director of Services. And Agnes who provides sexual and physical trauma counseling to over 200 women and girls per week or Leslie who began treatment in jail paid for from FOPP funds. She now co-ordinates jail programs working for the Sheriffs Dept. They now pay taxes, have health care, are building healthy families and are giving back to the communities and live lives that matter and are free from abuse.

SAGE has been replicated or is in the process of being replicated in over 25 other jurisdictions in the US, Canada and Europe.

In SAGE we measure success in terms of:

Real outcomes-
Real results

Utilizing the peer empowerment model, former prostitutes provide treatment and support. We achieve dramatic decreases in:

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
Depression
Suicide
Recidivism rates

Re-victimization
Increases

Self esteem

Confidence

Overall Health

Ability to take charge of their lives
Get and Keep legal jobs
Advance in education
Recover from drugs

What is harder to measure but is palpable is the

Compassion
Bravery
Courage to survive against all odds
Triumph of the human spirit and heart

Just imagine what we know to be true

She could be your daughter
She could be gone – lost forever

Ask yourself "How can you that be measured?"

