The Sisters Project: A Milwaukee Partnership to Address Prostitution

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**Partners**

- Benedict Center
- Medical College of Wisconsin
- Milwaukee County District Attorney’s Office
- Milwaukee Police Department, 3rd District
- Lutheran Church of the Reformation

**Background**

- Trading sex for money is illegal in most of the United States and is challenging for laws to address
- Many women are coerced into trading sex as minors and use the income to prevent homelessness and as a general means of survival.
- They suffer extremely high rates of victimization on the streets, including sexual assault, abuse drug addiction and isolation from positive social support.
- The economic and personal costs of prostitution activity are significant, and the journey out of prostitution is complex and incredibly challenging.
- Milwaukee’s 3rd District Police and its Community Prosecution Unit adopted an innovative approach: a municipal diversion program.

**Sisters Project Components**

Women arrested for prostitution have a choice: a ticket and a fine OR a minimum of 6-months in the Sisters Project.

- **Outreach**: focuses on building trusting relationships, offering respect, food, hygiene products, condom distribution, and other referrals if needed
- **Support Groups**: group classes to help women deal with violence they have faced as children and adults
- **Case Management**: continued relationships to connect women with resources to access needed services
- **Safety Plans**: development of action plans to assist women in ensuring their safety

**Results to Date**

- Since January 2013, approximately 75 women received services from the Sisters drop-in center, and 187 women were seen a total of 868 times by project outreach workers.
- Of the 88 women referred to our program through police contact since 2011, 66% already have or are currently successfully completing 6 months of programming and case management.
- 48% of women participated in gender-responsive and trauma-informed programs.
- 31% of drop-in participants developed personal safety plans.
- 21% self-report exiting prostitution for at least one month or more.
- Successful collaborations with neighborhood partners including Safe & Sound, Progressive Community Health, Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), and Washington Park Partners

From 2011-2013, 749 women were arrested in the city of Milwaukee for street prostitution; 75% of arrests were in police districts on the near north and near south sides of the city.

Women package condoms and information about STI testing for distribution at youth centers and clinics.