

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 10, 2009

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FORMER PROSTITUTE

RUNS PROSTITUTE RESCUE PROGRAM

Los Angeles / San Fernando Valley: Dianne Amato, a former prostitute of 20 years' duration with a history of arrests in the community in which she now helps women leave prostitution, has for the past year been working as Program Director at The Mary Magdalene Project.

The Mary Magdalene Project is a nearly 30-year old agency specializing in longer-term residential treatment programs that assist women (age 18 or greater) prostitutes and their families permanently out of prostitution. As Program Director she oversees all programmatic interventions of the agency but primarily manages the long-term residential site known as Hayman House, located at an undisclosed location in Reseda, CA.

"I wish I'd have known there was help to get out when I was trying to leave," says Dianne. "I would not have wasted so many years of my life."

"These are the kids we all failed to protect 10, 20 and 30 years ago."

Dianne is like the usual client at MMP in some ways, and unlike them in others. "I know how hard it is to break free of the life," says Dianne. "But I was at least spared the addictions so many of our women face. I also wish I'd not have to have done this on my own." MMP focuses most of its attention on the women it believes represents the women of highest need, the street walking prostitutes. Agency records for the past quarter century tells them over 85% of female prostitutes have a history of childhood sexual molestation, 79% have substance abuse and mental health disorders, and nearly 80% have 3 or more children.

Mary Magdalene Project Services

Until recently, MMP was exclusively a longer term residential program focusing on food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental needs, psychotherapy for post traumatic stress disorders, family reunification and job training to replace prostitution as a source of income. As of July of

2009, MMP opens a brand new intervention service modeled after another social service agency with a former prostitute at the helm. The MMP Drop In Center is based upon a very successful program in San Francisco called "SAGE" (Standing Against Global Exploitation), an outreach and drop in clinic begun in 1998 by former prostitute Norma Hoteling. Designed to be a harm reduction program for women still involved in prostitution but with interventions to assist them in getting out, its history has been a beacon to other social service providers looking to help women and families out of the desperate and dangerous cycle of prostitution dependence.

"It's not easy for women to exit prostitution," says Dr. Martin McCombs, psychologist and Executive Director of MMP for the past 6 years. "The average starting age is 15, and these women have horrific abusive histories that prompt them to believe this is all they have to offer the world. They are runaway and throwaway youth. Some are pimp-controlled, many have multiple co-occurring disorders, and once you're in you begin to become caught up in a cycle that includes a lack of education, no job history, and often an inability to function among regular society. The majority of prostitutes have tried to leave multiple times."

Bad economy drives lower-SES women to prostitution to support families

"We've seen a recent spike in requests for help," says Dr. McCombs. "This bad economy is making even greater numbers of lower socioeconomic status women turn to desperate measures to keep their families alive, and in the meantime the reductions in donor giving and grant sources are creating our own economic desperation for our agency."

McCombs hopes the agency's stepping up to increase its community level impact by opening a community drop in clinic at a time like this will prompt more support and attention from donors of all kinds. "These women are a significantly misunderstood special needs population," says he. "They seem to inspire a lot of rage from communities who think they're out there because they like it instead of the fact they're risking everything just to survive."

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ADDITIONAL CONTACTS / RELATED STORIES:

Ms. Amato is available for interviews.

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