

March 2015

# The Justice Project Newsletter



Photos from the annual Mardi Gras celebration.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Justice Project has been appointed to the Kansas Attorney General's Human Trafficking Advisory Board.

The Justice Project is a member of the Law Enforcement and LGBTQ Advocacy Coalition spearheaded by our community partner, KCAVP.

## PARTNERSHIPS IN JUSTICE

The Justice Project is proud to partner with The Kansas City Anti Violence Project. Together we educate the public about the trauma of violence as a person is bullied and discriminated against for their gender expression. KCAVP has stepped up to help when transgendered women have become victims of abuse in employment or other public places. KCAVP staff often attends "Willow Tree" Tuesday evening dinners to participate in discussions with the Justice Project guests. [Info@kcapv.org](mailto:Info@kcapv.org)

## HOUSING FIRST

The best first step in recovery from sexual abuse, drug and alcohol addiction is assisting the survivor to locate housing; then the addiction issues are more likely to be faced and treatment sought. Thankfully many of the Justice Project clients are now living in safe housing, not just shelters. Working with various housing voucher programs, Journey To New Life, and other assistance programs, women now find and create their own home space. The March issue of Mother Jones magazine documents reports that Utah's "Housing First" Program saved the state about \$10,000 per person when each was in housing first rather than their usual continual emergency room, detox, street violence treatment process. "The old model was well intentioned but misinformed. You actually need housing to achieve sobriety and stability, not the other way around." Sam Tsemberis, New York University psychologist. We certainly agree!

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## WORDS DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As awareness of present day slavery expands, more attention is being given to the crime of human trafficking through prostitution. Prostitution is often viewed as a "victimless crime." Nothing could be further from the truth. Hazards include rape, robbery, assault, exposure to sexually transmitted illnesses, and most unfortunately death at the hands of violent tricks, drug dealers, or pimps. Because of their poverty, homelessness, hunger, and /or addiction, many of the women served by the Justice Project have been exploited, victimized and severely traumatized through prostitution.

As law enforcement, courts and service providers begin to attack this devastating crime and interact with survivors, it is apparent that a quick tutorial on terminology is needed. Words have power, and the labels and descriptive language we use contribute to our perceptions of commercial sex trafficking and the victims produced by this terrible crime. Prostitution is one of the most harmful manifestations of human trafficking. The importance of proper terminology when addressing this issue can not be underestimated. Words make a difference in how those used in prostitution are perceived. Harmful labels lead to misunderstanding and bias toward those who have been used in prostitution. Negative labels also contribute to low self esteem and self hatred in those who have been harmed by experiencing prostitution.

The word "prostitute" is generally perceived as negative and derogatory. It implies that someone is "dirty" a "whore" a "slut", a bad person who is unworthy, and a social outcast. It does not take into consideration that the individual is a human being, one who may be someone's mother, daughter, sister, or brother. The word dehumanizes this population and perpetuates negative stereotypical labels. At the Justice Project we only use "prostitute" as a verb. Prostitution is something a person does, not who that person is. We view prostitution as an exploitive form of violence against persons, and a major human rights violation. We advocate for the use of other terms like "prostituted persons," "persons used in prostitution", or "sexually exploited persons." These terms do not stigmatize victims, and describe prostitution as an abusive experience, not a personal characteristic of an individual.

Two other terms frequently seen as "politically correct" we do not use are "Sex Work and Sex Worker." These terms are now widely used instead of "prostitute" by those working in the field of trafficking abolition. While these terms may be well-intentioned, it is our belief they infer prostitution is somehow "work" an occupation, a job. This tends to imply a normalization of prostitution as a career choice. Sex trafficking through prostitution is human slavery. It is not "work."

When discussing prostitution and its survivors please remember to use phrases like "prostituted person" "sex industry survivor" or "victim of commercial sexual exploitation." These terms relay the idea that persons used in prostitution are entangled in an inherently dangerous, traumatizing, exploitive system that victimizes human beings. They are girls, boys, men, and women who have been dehumanized not only by prostitution but also by the terminology used to describe them. They are individuals who deserve dignity, respect, compassion, and mercy just like anyone else. ---*Kris Wade*



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