

Rational Justice

Benedict Center *Compassion • Justice • Action • Transformation*

1st Quarter, 2016

MISSION

The Benedict Center is an interfaith, nonprofit criminal justice agency working with victims, offenders, and the community to achieve a system of justice that is fair and treats everyone with dignity and respect.

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The Benedict Center is
a proud member of



**Choose to support us through
your workplace gift!**

Please join us to celebrate our new location



Benedict Center

OPEN HOUSE

Friday, April 8

1849 N. Dr. Martin Luther King Dr, Suite 101

11am to 2pm • *Brief presentation at 12:15*

Meet our staff, take a tour,
talk with our board, enjoy
some refreshments



For more information call 414.347.1774
Street parking available • *All are invited!*

**Thank you to those who helped support us through
our move—financially and with in-kind donations.**

Benedict Center Adds Mental Health Therapy, Hires New Clinical Program Director with Grant

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Jails are America's largest mental health care providers. A UWM study showed that in 2012, 58% of mothers of minor children at the Milwaukee County House of Correction and Jail reported a mental health treatment history and more than 80% of all women with mental health histories also tested positive on a substance abuse screen. However, the study showed women struggle to find adequate mental health treatment support in the community or in jail.



Director, Dr. Joan Kojis

To meet this need, the Benedict Center was pleased to accept a \$100,000 grant from Aurora Health Care Better Together Fund. This allowed us to expand our behavioral health capacity by adding licensed mental health treatment to our Women's Harm Reduction Program, which already offered substance abuse treatment. This means hundreds of additional women will receive needed mental health services each year.

The grant allowed us to hire Dr. Joan Kojis, a clinical psychologist who led the

changes in the Benedict Center becoming a co-occurring (substance abuse and mental health) program. Dr. Kojis has extensive experience in corrections and child welfare, where she worked in Probation and Parole, consulted for Racine Correctional and supervised psychologists at Taycheedah Correctional Institution for women. She is a former director of Children's Service Society which included work in child welfare and was one of the Behavioral Health Managers for Ozaukee County for over 10 years. She has known about and supported the Benedict Center for many years and considers this job: "saving the best for last!"

Kojis explains, "We are addressing the specific needs of the whole woman, which includes the underlying mental health issues of her substance abuse. This improves her ability to recover, to care for herself and her children."

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Board President Steve Steiner and Executive Director Jeanne Geraci accepting grant from Aurora Health Care Better Together Fund.

Training Sisters to Be Leaders

“Leadership helped me realize that I am important to society. I do matter. Since starting I have taken classes to be a Peer Specialist, got a job as a security guard, and have started a committee at my church to offer people information regarding health and well-being. Leadership truly motivates me.” These are powerful words from one of our Sisters leaders.

Consultant Claudine O’Leary is leading a group of women in the Sisters Program through a monthly leadership development process. The group began as a focus group to gain input from the women on the service and policy direction of the Sisters Program, but has grown to be much more. The women have begun to shift from understanding the connection of their individual struggle and journey to the commonalities they have with other women in the sex trade, the underlying factors and challenges they face (ie: poverty, sexism, racism, child abuse/trauma) and how they might lead a community level change to benefit

themselves and others in similar situations.

The main idea behind the Sisters Leadership Circle is to train, support and develop the leadership of Sisters Program participants to be active in Benedict Center program decisions, advocate for system changes and grow in their ability to take on more roles inside the organization and throughout the community. The Sisters Program is a street outreach, case management, and skill-building program for women engaged in prostitution and sex trafficking.

The group meets at least once a month on a Saturday morning to

educate themselves on the work of Sisters, how to advocate for policy changes and practice new skills like speaking to local stakeholders or mapping the problem areas and resources in our community.

We are at the stage now where Sisters Leaders are taking their knowledge and skills into the community to participate in key meetings with community members and decision-makers, focus groups, Sisters events, resource fairs and bring back information to the group. Sisters leaders share their perspectives with decision makers and the community and voice the program’s policy change goals.

It is an effective way to change hearts and minds. When a Sisters leader attended a community meeting, Alderman Stamper was so impressed with her comments that he asked her to join his task force to solving housing shortages for women like her.

Directly engaging the women in our program in leadership, advocacy and organizing not only draws on their wisdom and experiences, it helps tackle the stereo-types of women involved in the sex trade.

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TRAINING SISTERS TO BE LEADERS, continued from page 3

The Sisters Leaders report feeling good that they are helping by changing the opinions of others about the issue of prostitution and the need for treatment and support instead of criminalization. Previously they thought the main thing they could do as leaders was become mentors to other women in the sex trade. While this is true, their vision of leadership is expanding to support systemic change (policy shifts).

At the core, the idea behind the Sisters Leadership Circle is all social justice efforts need to have those most affected at the center and in key leadership positions. The Sisters Leadership Circle is intentionally designed to move women from participating at Sisters to taking on leadership at Sisters. This includes learning about all the behind the

scenes work it takes to make a program like Sisters.

One of the biggest successes from last year was to create opportunities for Sisters Leaders to not only meet and know each of the partners on the Sisters Program, like Dr. Staci Young and Tammy Rivera and Chris Ladwig but to be working alongside the partners on a more regular basis at Benedict Center and Sisters events. This included inviting the partners on a weekend morning for a conversation shaped and led by the Sisters Leaders themselves.

In a Sisters Leader's words, "Since starting Leadership I've truly been looking at my life and to see where I want it to go. This group has given me lots of strengths. This group is empowering things inside of me that I didn't know were there. I am a better

person because of this program."

Funding for the program comes from the Women's Fund of Greater Milwaukee, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Racine Dominican Mission Fund, Priests of the Sacred Heart, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Trostel Family Fund and the Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program through the Medical College of Wisconsin, as well as congregations and individuals.

According to O'Leary, "the Leadership Circle is valuable because Sisters Leaders bring a passion to this work and are filled with brilliant ideas and willingness to help in every situation. The Sisters program and our advocacy keep getting stronger because of the insight and dedication of Sisters Leaders."



Sisters Leaders and Partners



WISH LIST *The women need the following items:* • Coats all sizes, especially XL-XXL • Socks • Towels • Toothbrush/toothpaste • Mouthwash • Travel size hygiene products (ie: shampoo, soap) • Feminine napkins & tampons • Deodorant • Toilet paper • Wet wipes individually wrapped • Reading glasses various strengths



Coaching



Employment and Community Coordinator CeCe Brown and Tara upon completion of the group

Transforming Lives Through Employment

Women at the Benedict Center want to work. They know a job is key to supporting themselves and their children. It can be challenging, however, if you do not have job experience or if you have a criminal record. Our Employment Readiness Program not only helps justice involved women interview and obtain a job, it helps them understand employer expectations in the workplace and improve interpersonal communication skills needed to retain the job. Key to the program is a 10 session group based in cognitive behavioral therapy that helps women practice the skills needed to be successful. They also learn to write a resume, practice interviews, and conduct targeted job search.

One of the strengths of the program is its built-in flexibility and individualized plans to address individual needs. For example, Dorothy came to us with a goal of working in an office, but lacked experience. Cynthia (CeCe) Brown, Benedict Center Employment and Community Coordinator, connected Dorothy with

a community partner, Lydia Beasley at Browns Beasley Accounting, LLC for a job training opportunity.

Ms. Beasley provided Dorothy with hands-on training in typing, Excel and Word in an office setting, as well as employer expectations, following directives, time management and dependability. What stood out to Ms. Beasley was Dorothy's positive attitude as she was learning these new skills.

"Research identifies the lack of employment opportunities for returning prisoners as the most important barrier to a successful reentry. Soft skills are essential to employability. As a former Human Resources Director, it's about making sure that the clients have the tools they need to adapt and thrive in the workplace so they can maintain employment and self-sufficiency," says Brown.

Brown utilizes coaching based on Motivational Interviewing techniques: "I don't just want them to get a

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survival job, but to focus on a career path. I support the client along the path of success by helping them meet their career goals. That's done by building a relationship of mutual trust. We explore options, and get a commitment to act."

In the past year, women have gained employment in the fields of customer service, food service, and bookkeeping. We work to develop relationships with businesses for training and job placement. We offer follow up support for women to help them maintain employment. Johnson Controls provides volunteers to conduct mock interviews and donates professional clothes suitable for an interview. If you are interested in becoming a partner, contact CeCe Brown at 414.347.1774 ext. 205 or cbrown@benedictcenter.org.



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1849 N. Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, Suite 101
Milwaukee, WI 53212

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Rational Justice is a publication of the Benedict Center. Thank you for your support and interest in our work. Please share this newsletter with friends and colleagues.
Layout by MMK Design

Support our mission with the enclosed envelope
or donate online at www.benedictcenter.org

In Memory of ILONA GONZALEZ

We are deeply saddened to have lost a dedicated volunteer on February 1st. Ilona Gonzalez designed and helped write our newsletter since 2013. She strongly supported our mission and generously lent her talent and creativity in a loving way. A double alumna of Alverno College, she was about to launch a new career as an adult educator. She is survived by her son, sister and parents. Please join us as we keep Ilona, her family and friends in our thoughts and prayers. We celebrate the vibrant young woman who encouraged us all to keep "being curious *all the time.*"



Photo by Ilona Gonzalez, the iconic statue on Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, less than a block from the Benedict Center.



Your table's waiting...

**Friends of
the Benedict Center**

**SPRING
LUNCHEON**

Tuesday, June 7, 2016

Milwaukee Yacht Club

For more info:
marianne.kingwi@gmail.com

