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COVID-19 PRESENTS SPECIAL HURDLES FOR THOSE HELPING SEX TRADE VICTIMS

Sisters' magazine offers inside look at street outreach teams' life-saving efforts

Milwaukee, WI, September 10, 2020 – Street outreach has been an essential component of the Benedict Center Sisters Program South Collaborative since the inception of this faith-based partnership five years ago. The initiative, of which the School Sisters of St. Francis are a founding partner, has helped hundreds of women in the street-based sex trade, including women victimized by sex trafficking on Milwaukee's south side.

In an interview published in the Fall issue of the congregation's *Alive* magazine, Jeanne Geraci, executive director of the Benedict Center, shares an inside look at the daily work of the program's outreach teams. She said their mission has faced additional obstacles due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our clients do not have the luxury of isolating or social distancing, as many are homeless or housing insecure," Geraci explained. "We responded by keeping our outreach going while many other programs temporarily closed.

"The opioid crisis has also created a high level of desperation in the community," she said. "We share that pain collectively, and support each other through the tough times."

Geraci said that the program's outreach teams have become a trusted presence in Milwaukee with a client population that traditionally has deep hesitation to trust.

"The dedicated staff meet our clients on the street, respond to their calls, and invite them to the Drop-In Center for further assistance with basic needs, case management, and counseling,"

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The article details how the six team members spend their day and interact with clients. On an average day, Geraci said, the team will have 25 conversations with women. Common interactions include checking on a woman's health and wellness, providing access to information, and crisis intervention.

The full article, and many more feature stories, are included in the Fall issue of *Alive*, which is now available for free reading online at <https://www.sssf.org/SSSF/Media-Room/Publications.htm>

About the School Sisters of St. Francis

The School Sisters of St. Francis are an international community of Catholic sisters who unite with others to build a just and peaceful world. Founded in 1874, they now have sisters, associates, staff, donors and volunteers actively working to address the needs of those who are poor and marginalized by society. Their mission is thriving throughout the United States, Europe, Latin America, India, and Tanzania. For more information about the School Sisters of St. Francis, please visit www.sssf.org.

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