

Norma Hotaling is the founder and Executive Director of SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation), Inc., a nonprofit organization in San Francisco that helps former prostitutes live healthy lives. Before starting this program in 1993, Ms. Hotaling lived on the streets as a homeless prostitute addicted to heroin. The services available in San Francisco helped Norma rebuild her life; she later returned to college and earned a degree in health education at San Francisco State University. In founding SAGE, Ms. Hotaling formed a partnership with San Francisco police officers and the District Attorney's Office. SAGE programs have won numerous awards, including the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the Ford Foundation, the Peter F. Drucker Award for Innovation in Non-Profit Management, and Oprah's Angel Network – Use Your Life Award.



San Francisco's Successful Strategies: Prevention Services for Girls and the First Offender Prostitution Program

Norma Hotaling

There is no other city doing what we're doing. Everyone just arrests the women and throws them in jail. But we're getting them off the streets, getting them vocational training, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on the medical care the city spends on these women.

Norma Hotaling, quoted in *The New York Times* (Nieves, 1999)

In any given year, San Francisco police make an average of 4,000 prostitution-related arrests. In 1998, the District Attorney's Office estimated that the city spent more than \$4.1 million to prosecute prostitution-related offenses, an estimate that does not include the high costs of incarceration and probation. To combat this costly problem, San Francisco initiated a variety of programs administered by the SAGE Project, including Prevention Services for Girls and the First Offender Prostitution Program, collaborative efforts involving several city departments. These programs are designed to intervene with prostituted teens and with men who engage the services of prostituted women and girls.

Who Are the Men Who Prostitute Women and Girls?

Adult men who engage the services of prostitutes bring with them very complex emotional, psychological, and sexual needs. They attempt to satisfy those needs with young adults whom they pay essentially to lie to them. When this false intimacy proves unsatisfactory and/or they believe that they have a "right" to service and pleasure at any cost, they progress to younger and younger children. They use many justifications for their actions, such as:

- "They are poor and I am feeding them."
- "They keep coming back; therefore, they must like it."
- "Having sex with younger children helps to prevent STDs or HIV."

One of the characteristics commonly found among men who perpetrate violence (including sexual violence and prostitution) is an expectation of service. These men believe that they have a "right" to prostitute young women and girls because "men have greater sex drives than women;" moreover, these drives or needs override the needs and rights of others. Very few of these men are completely indiscriminate as to how this "need" is satisfied, and by whom.

Research studies show a clear pattern for men who prostitute women. Typically, men begin their prostitute use with adult women; later they "progress" to prostituting children. A study of 5,000 "johns" in San Francisco revealed that the majority of men who engaged the services of prostituted children followed this pattern (San Francisco District Attorney, 2000). Although some children are prostituted by pedophiles and preferential abusers, the majority of the several million men who annually exploit prostitutes under the age of 18 years are first and foremost prostitute users who become child sexual abusers through their prostitute use.

Oftentimes, the violence perpetrated by men on prostituted women also includes physical abuse. A study of abuse of 130 prostituted females in San Francisco revealed that 82% of the women and girls had been physically assaulted and 68% had been repetitively raped (Farley & Barkan, 1998). Both customers and pimps had abused the women and girls.

These disturbing findings point to the need for resocialization of men and boys so that they do not feel that it is their right to expect service, to be violent, and to engage in exploitive behaviors. San Francisco's SAGE Project designed a program to achieve this resocialization goal.

What is the SAGE Project?

SAGE is an acronym for Standing Against Global Exploitation. The SAGE Project, Inc. is organized by and for survivors of abuse, prostitution and trauma. The staff of SAGE is comprised of women who have "beaten the odds" by overcoming histories of multiple arrests, trauma, substance abuse, homelessness, poverty, and prostitution. The personal knowledge and experience possessed by the staff enables them to effectively provide support and engender trust without re-traumatizing even the most fragile of clients. SAGE is the only organization in the area that can give prostituted teens and women role models who once were in the same predicament as they are.

More than 350 women and girls receive direct services each week from SAGE. Of the girls who have been in SAGE's in- and out-of-custody programs since 1995:

- The average age of entry into prostitution is 13-14 years.
- 60-75% have experienced domestic violence in their personal relationships.
- 75% have experienced violence in their community, including gun violence, gang violence, physical assaults getting to school, while in school, and in their neighborhood.
- 60% (in custody) and 40% (out of custody) have experienced sexual assault (gang, acquaintance, and stranger).
- 95-97% have used/abused substances ranging from marijuana to ecstasy, speed, heroin, and alcohol.

Typically, this population of girls fails mentoring programs because they are so troubled. One professional who directs mentoring programs stated: "They need both incredible help before they can accept a mature adult in their lives, and reality checks from people who have been where they are. These girls see violence and sexual exploitation as a norm."

Therefore, the first need of these girls is to learn to trust responsible, respectful and caring adults and peers, to learn how to form durable relationships based on mutual support and affection. Otherwise, they will not become productive, healthy, or fully integrated into society.

At SAGE, women and girls receive assistance in exiting the criminal justice system, escaping prostitution and pornography, and recovering from abuse. They also receive medical and mental health care, peer counseling, substance abuse treatment, housing, legal immigration status, intensive case management, education, and vocational training. SAGE's direct service programs often focus on the most exploited victims who are, therefore, the highest users of the medical, social, mental health, and criminal justice systems.

In addition to providing direct services, SAGE engages in advocacy, educational programs, and outreach activities. Staff reach out to prostituted women living on the streets of San Francisco, inviting them to enter programs and receive services. They also provide educational classes and training for women and who are incarcerated and girls in the juvenile justice system.

SAGE's ongoing programs include the following:

1. **Prevention Services for Girls** provides intensive case management, education, health and mental health care, substance abuse treatment, job skills training, and mentoring to girls both in custody and on probation. (See program description below.)
2. **The First Offenders Prostitution Program "John School"** is designed to resocialize men and boys arrested as "johns." (See program description below.)
3. **The Sexual Exploitation and Violence Prevention and Treatment Program** offers city-wide services for girls between the ages of 14 and 17 years who are involved in the criminal justice system because of violence, drug offenses, or prostitution. This program is designed to address the factors that place girls at risk for delinquent behaviors and to create an empowerment process that enables the girls to educate the larger community about their issues.
4. **Juvenile Probation Training** is offered to juvenile probation personnel. This program focuses on issues faced by girls upon release from custody and assists with referrals to appropriate in-program care, including mental health services, job training, and medical care.

What is Prevention Services for Girls?

Prevention Services for Girls was initiated as a program for girls in custody and was expanded in 1998 to include girls on probation. The program provides intensive case management, education, health and mental health care, substance abuse treatment, job skills training—and mentoring, when the girls are ready to benefit from it. The purpose of the program is to aid the girls to permanently exit the criminal justice system and to rebuild their lives free of sexual exploitation, prostitution, and abuse. This component of the program uses the Evans and Sullivan "blended treatment" model to simultaneously address problems associated with substance abuse and domestic violence.

Which Needs Does Prevention Services for Girls Address?

The program addresses fundamental needs in several areas.

- **Homelessness:** Many of the girls are homeless once they are released from custody. They require assistance in obtaining and keeping housing; they also require financial counseling. Without these services, they have no choice but to return to their abusers, prostitute themselves, or engage in drug selling and other criminal behavior.

- **Medical care:** Many of the girls who enter the program are not obtaining responsible, continuing health care. Many are HIV+ and suffer the effects of untreated venereal disease, as well as general medical illnesses. Drug use is rampant—a further symptom of their underlying traumatic disturbance. The lack of appropriate care results in increased emergency services use and increased health care costs.
- **Mental health care:** The girls who enter the program often experience episodes of dissociation and engage in criminal antisocial behavior. Many have attempted suicide.
- **Life and job skills:** The girls often come from families in which economic self-sufficiency was not emphasized or was lacking altogether. Most have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school. They require assistance in continuing their education, obtaining GED degrees, and accessing vocational training. A substantial number are immigrants for whom fluency in English is an issue.
- **Emotional development:** This population often displays markedly arrested emotional development. They have never learned mature self-control or been counseled in methods of problem solving other than violence, exploding in rage or running away when frustrated. To fulfill any of their other needs, they require counseling, stress reduction, and problem solving skills training.

How Successful is Prevention Services for Girls?

Prevention Services for Girls has been in effect for four years. From July 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001 the project served 48 young women, providing a total of 2,427 units of service. In 2000, Prevention Services for Girls showed the following results:

- 86% avoided re-entry into the criminal justice system or re-victimization.
- 52% of drug abusing clients were in recovery.
- 81% returned to school, entered a GED program or obtained employment.
- 86% demonstrated the ability to build positive support systems and mentoring relationships.
- 81% were more knowledgeable about the connection between sexual assault, domestic violence, violence, prostitution, pornography, and their long-term impacts.
- 71% utilized appropriate medical and counseling care rather than relying on inappropriate emergency services.

What is the First Offenders Prostitution Program?

San Francisco is the first jurisdiction ever to focus its law enforcement on the demand side of prostitution. The **First Offender Prostitution Program** (FOPP), designed and implemented by the SAGE Project and the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, is a multifaceted approach to combating the problem of prostitution. The program was initiated when the strategy of only addressing women's needs was found to be ineffective because it did not deal with the perpetrators of violence and did nothing to address the socialization of men toward violence. FOPP was founded on the principle that it is essential to prevent violence by resocializing men and boys, intervening early with men and boys who perpetrate violence, and treating offenders with stronger and stronger mandatory interventions both in and out of custody.

Who Are the Project's Collaborators?

FOPP involves a unique collaboration among several agencies:

SAGE Project, Inc.
San Francisco District Attorney's Office
Mayor's Office
Police Department
Department of Public Health
Victim-Witness Assistance Program
Sheriff's Department
Probation Department
Juvenile Justice System
Commission on the Status of Women
Community-based service providers
Advocates

What Is the John School?

One element of FOPP is the John School, which is offered as an alternative to jail for first time offenders. Administrative fees collected from participating johns fund operations. The school attempts to change offenders' attitudes toward women through a 7-session curriculum:

1. **Prostitution and Street Facts**, facilitated by the Assistant District Attorney, describes the penal risks and practical consequences of continued criminal conduct involving crimes against prostitutes and child prostitution.
2. **STD and HIV Risk and Prevention Education**, facilitated by the San Francisco Department of Public Health, includes a very graphic slide presentation about sexually transmitted diseases.
3. **Testimonial Presentation About Prostitution**, facilitated by prostituted survivors of the sex industry, involves discussions of childhood risk factors that lead to prostitution, violence, drug use, rehabilitation, and reintegration into the community.
4. **Pimp Dynamics and the Trafficking of Young Girls**, facilitated by SAGE Executive Director Norma Hotaling, educates customers about the tactics used to draw young girls into prostitution and brings attention to the worldwide exploitation of women and girls—removing any delusions the men might have about prostituted women enjoying their work.
5. **Effects of Prostitution on Neighborhoods**, facilitated by neighborhood activists, focuses on the effects of prostitution on the quality of life in neighborhoods, as well as on the economic effects of prostitution on the city.
6. **Domestic Violence Prevention Program**, facilitated by a licensed marriage/family therapist, educates men about violence against women, anger management, and conflict resolution.
7. **Sexual Addiction and Intimacy**, facilitated by a licensed marriage/family therapist, addresses sexual addiction and potential management and support.

John Schools have been implemented in other cities as well, including Buffalo, NY, and Vancouver and Toronto, Canada.

How Successful is FOPP?

From 1995 to 1997, FOPP diverted more than 5,000 customers of prostitutes from criminal prosecution to an educational and rehabilitation experience. Of the men who had completed the program, 98% remained arrest free in 1997 (San Francisco District Attorney's Office, 1997).

Buffalo, New York instituted a John School modeled after the San Francisco program. The Buffalo Prostitution Task Force reported the following successes in 1999:

- From 1996 to 1998 the number of prostitution-related calls to 911 was reduced by 50%, from 999 to 511.
- In two years, the John School reduced the rate of males soliciting prostitution from 8% to .05%.
- Because the participants pay the costs of the program (\$1,200), it costs taxpayers nothing. With 13 or more participants, money is available to fund programs to help prostituted women and girls.
- Jails and courts are less congested; as a result, court costs are reduced.

Similar results were obtained in 1996 in Vancouver, British Columbia when police began arresting more johns and pimps. By the end of that year, prostitution-related offenses had been reduced 87%, from 944 to 121.

Awards for SAGE Projects

Through its efforts, SAGE has turned around the lives of more than 800 former prostitutes and more than 5,000 former "johns." Project also have raised public awareness concerning the sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and girls.

In 1998, the First Offender Prostitution Program was awarded the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and The Ford Foundation. SAGE's Peer Support Program received the 2000 Peter F. Drucker Award for Innovation in Non-Profit Management, as well as the Oprah's Angel Network – Use Your Life Award. These awards affirm the importance of the restorative justice programs that SAGE has created for customers of prostitutes, the trauma and drug recovery programs for women and girls who are victims of violence and are in the criminal justice system, and trafficked women and girls, as well as women and girls involved in all aspects of the sex industry.