

The early years

In July, 2000, supported by a start-up grant from the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kristy launched a new program of services offered specifically to prostituted persons in Kansas City in honor of **Veronica Neverdusky.** A victim of commercial sexual exploitation, Veronica was murdered in 1993.

Veronica's Voice began in Kristy's dining room. Early services included staffing a 24-hour crisis line with survivors of prostitution to address victims' needs for urgent care support, and reaching out to women on the streets with peer support and personal items.

Knowing that many prostituted persons are fearful and reluctant to report violence, in 2001, Kristy and other survivor volunteers with Veronica's Voice, began accompanying victims through the examination and reporting process, building a partnership with SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners), and advocating for and guiding victims through the legal process in the event of a trial.

The year 2002 saw many new services offered by Veronica's Voice, including the securing of eight beds at local shelters dedicated to women involved in prostitution, a comprehensive restorative justice program, or "**Johnz School.**" to educate buyers on the realities of commercial sexual exploitation, and an alternative sentencing program allowing women charged with prostitution or related crimes to receive diversion from incarceration and intensive probation supervision.

2003 brought the opening of the "Safe Center," an outreach and recovery center in one of Kansas City's most well-known areas for crime, prostitution and drugs. Veronica's Voice received the **Northeast Community Betterment Award** for its work enhancing the quality of life in the Independence Plaza Neighborhood.

In June 2004, Veronica's Voice incorporated, and was awarded 501(c)(3) nonprofit status by the IRS, having operated until then under the umbrella of other 501(c)(3) organizations.

As we grew

Veronica's Voice staff attended the Department of Justice Human Trafficking Rescue Training Ending Domestic Violence & Human Trafficking Symposium in San Francisco, CA, in 2006. Veronica's Voice provided key language and actual case histories of survivors of commercial sexual exploitation to support the Federal Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), recognizing American children under 18 in a commercial sex act as human trafficking victims. Veronica's Voice became a partner to the newly formed Coalition Against Human Trafficking, the Coalition of the Missouri Dept. of Justice Human Trafficking Task Force.

In 2007, Veronica's Voice began providing case management services to prostituted women and youth and those leaving prostitution. Veronica's Voice received funding from several foundations and church organizations, hired additional support staff, and held its first annual community awareness "Courage to Change" Walk, raising almost \$3,000.

By 2008, Veronica's Voice was working with over 80 clients, had 45 program graduates, and hosted its second annual community awareness "Courage to Change" Walk, raising almost \$4,000; and, by 2009, served more than 117 clients, graduated 60 women, and held a third walk, raising more than \$5,000.

In 2010, Veronica's Voice joined other community recovery organizations to found KC-SATRSC (Kansas City Substance Abuse and Treatment Recovery Support Coalition). Veronica's Voice survivors held their first annual "Survivors Holiday Walk," raising over \$10,000. Veronica's Voice co-sponsored the first "Call for Community Action Conference" held at the Kansas City, Missouri Police Academy, where Kristy was key note speaker. Veronica's Voice received a Proclamation from Mayor Mark Funkhouser, honoring Veronica's Voice for emulating the spirit of International Volunteer Day and being an outstanding example of volunteerism throughout Kansas City, Missouri.

A new initiative

While Veronica's Voice staff worked tirelessly for ten years to empower those who are exploited transition into healthy, safe and fulfilling lives away from prostitution and abuse, it became clear that these services needed to be taken to the next level. So, in 2011, Veronica's Voice purchased its first property, a historic home located in midtown Kansas City, Missouri, to serve as a residential facility for women as they recover and build new lives away from the violence of the commercial sex trade. With plans to open the following spring, Veronica's Voice raised \$20,000 during its Holiday Open House and tour of the home. Veronica's Voice co-sponsored the second "Call for Community Action Conference" held at the Kansas City, Missouri Police Academy.

Veronica's Voice hosted its first-ever "Demand Change" Conference 2012, featuring national speakers. This conference was attended by more than 250 people and gained more community support and awareness for the issue. Yet, sadly, public resistance in the neighborhood thwarted plans for the property in Midtown, which was then sold in 2013. Veronica's Voice continued to provide its outreach and Safe Center services, hosted its second "Demand Change" conference in the fall of 2013, and co-sponsored the third "Call for Community Action Conference" held at Washburn University.

Veronica's Voice's second effort to secure a property to provide safe housing and programming for recovering women unfortunately were met with "Not In My Back Yard" protests, making the local news.

Restructure

The battles with public opposition in Kansas City, Missouri made it clear to leaders of Veronica's Voice that efforts and resources to make the home a reality must be refocused, and a move across state lines was inevitable. In the fall of 2013 through March 2014, Veronica's Voice phased out its Safe Center programming, moving administrative offices to Kansas City, Kansas.

Veronica's Voice continued outreach, school and community awareness, and maintained a crisis line, but the primary focus was on the path to offer the first facility of its kind in Kansas City to provide a safe haven, as well as a place of healing for women seeking escape from commercial sexual exploitation.

Veronica's Voice found and paid in full that property in August 2015. All renovations and preparations were completed in November 2016, and the Program Coordinator was hired and trained. On December 16, 2016, women began being received into Veronica's Voice home: **Magdalene KC.**