



A WOMEN WITH A VISION PROJECT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**WWAV ANNOUNCES CROSSROADS DIVERSION PILOT PROGRAM**

*An alternative to incarceration that offers counseling, skills workshops, and leadership development for women arrested for involvement in street-based sex work*

On Wednesday, October 22, 2014, Women With A Vision, Inc. will present on their new Crossroads Diversion Pilot Program before the New Orleans City Council's Criminal Justice Committee Meeting. The meeting will be held at 2:00pm in the City Council Chambers.

Crossroads, currently in its pilot phase, aims to divert persons charged with misdemeanor prostitution offenses out of the criminal justice system. The program seeks to provide an alternative to incarceration and criminal adjudication for sex workers in New Orleans, linking them to social services and other assistance. Successful completion of diversion programs like Crossroads, allow individuals to avoid trial, conviction, and jail time.

In 2012, Women With A Vision first partnered with the New Orleans Municipal Court, Orleans District Attorney's Office, the City Attorney, Orleans Public Defenders, and the New Orleans Police Department to develop holistic, wrap-around case management services to participants in the Crossroads Diversion program.

Launched this fall, the pilot program is currently running out of Chief Judge Desiree Charbonnet's court room. To be eligible, someone has to be charged with a misdemeanor prostitution related offense, not currently be on probation or parole, have no violent convictions in the last five years, and have a current, local address. If a client is eligible and opts into the program, they come to Women With A Vision, where they are given a case manager who helps the client come up with an individual service plan that they must complete in order to successfully fulfill the program.

At WWAV, participants in the program attend classes about harm-reduction, know your rights trainings, safer sex education, navigating trauma, and many other evidence-based curriculums. These classes, or "sessions," are held once a week and last about 90 minutes. If the participants attend all of their mandated sessions (anywhere between 6 and 12), they will have their charge dismissed.

"There are many intersecting forces that lead women to engage in sex work: poverty, racism, lack of healthcare, and lack of educational opportunities or job opportunities that provide living

wages, and more,” said Women With a Vision Executive Director Deon Haywood. “It’s our belief at Women With A Vision that incarceration and conviction only serve to exacerbate these problems, cutting people off from the opportunities they need to live full, healthy lives. This program offers women access to support, resources, training, and other services that can allow new opportunities and new possibilities.”

Modeled after different programs across the nation and guided by evidence-based practices, trauma-informed counseling, and proven curriculums, Crossroads utilizes a holistic approach to addressing the immediate and long-term needs of our clients and other formerly-incarcerated women. Recognizing that many healing and wellness approaches are often short-term or crisis-oriented and thus trap people in survivalist thinking, Crossroads sees long-term goals and future planning as integral to the success of our clients and program.

Crossroads is a project of the Racial Justice Improvement Project (RJIP). The RJIP is a grant from the American Bar Association and Bureau of Justice Administration. The New Orleans RJIP Task Force is made up of key stakeholders in the criminal justice system: Judge Desiree M. Charbonnet, Mark Burton of the District Attorney’s Office, Charlene Larche-Mason of the City Attorney’s Office, Jee Park of the Orleans Public Defenders, Deon Haywood of WWAV, and Sgt. Anthony Rome of the NOPD.

At WWAV, Crossroads is part of our larger Emerge Project, which focuses on holistic healing for marginalized women, and women building healthy relationships and strong communities together. For further information on WWAV’s programs and related services, or to schedule an interview with Women With a Vision, please call 504-295-5249 or send an email to [leslie@wwav-no.org](mailto:leslie@wwav-no.org).

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Founded in 1989, Women With A Vision, Inc. (WWAV) is a community-based non-profit working to improve the lives of marginalized women, their families, and communities by addressing the social conditions and punitive policies that hinder their health and well-being. WWAV accomplishes this through relentless advocacy, health education, supportive services, and community-based participatory research. For more info visit [www.wwav-no.org](http://www.wwav-no.org). WWAV, Inc. is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit, based in New Orleans, Louisiana

***WWAV will be celebrating our 25th Anniversary on December 14, 2014 (6-9pm) at Mulate’s!***