

## Norma Hotaling 1951-2008

Norma Hotaling, founder and Executive Director of the SAGE Project in San Francisco died on December 16, 2008 following a short illness.

Norma Hotaling transformed her own experiences in prostitution into a mission of social justice for her sisters and brothers who had also been trafficked and exploited in prostitution. As a direct result of Ms. Hotaling's life work, many now have a profound understanding of the harm of prostitution and the responsibility of buyers for that harm. Through Ms. Hotaling the voices of survivors of commercial sexual exploitation reached the forefront of the global movement against human trafficking. Her life and her work dissolved myths about prostitution, proving it to be the world's oldest oppression rather than a

victimless crime. She was a beacon of courage and an extraordinarily effective champion of victimized and marginalized women, children, men and transgendered people.



At the SAGE Project, Ms. Hotaling created a service agency for all survivors of sexual exploitation. SAGE especially welcomed those who had been prostituted and trafficked. Her model of peer-led services offered by those who had "been there, done that" as she explained, inspired people in prostitution who felt that they previously had no hope. Many survivors of prostitution who arrived at the doors of SAGE are emphatic that their lives were saved by the example of Ms. Hotaling's life and her affection for them as people who she deeply cared for.

Ms. Hotaling founded The First Offender Program, a prostitution diversion program run jointly by SAGE and the San Francisco District Attorney's office. Informally referred to as the "johns' school," the First Offender Program continues to offer educational programs to men arrested for soliciting prostitution, teaching them about prostitution's harms to women, the community, and to their own health. Hotaling's model of the "johns' school" is now used throughout the United States and in Canada, South Korea, and England.

Ms. Hotaling led The SAGE Project's staff while she also frequently spoke at conferences and provided counsel to public policy experts. She frequently testified for the United States Congress and the California legislature about the harms of prostitution and the needs of those in it. Although based in San Francisco, Ms. Hotaling's work took her around the world where she worked with governmental leaders and agencies. She worked tirelessly with journalists in the print and broadcast media to help create a comprehensive picture of prostitution.

Ms. Hotaling was a board member and leader of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), one of the many organizations she worked with. She received numerous awards for her work. In 1998, SAGE and the First Offender Prostitution Program were recognized as one of the best examples of innovation from among more than 1,800 nominated programs. The programs were given the Innovations in American Government Award jointly from the Ford Foundation, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and the Council for Excellence in Government.

In 2000 SAGE's peer education program was celebrated with the Peter F. Drucker Foundation Award for Nonprofit Innovation.

In 2001, Ms. Hotaling was honored with an Oprah's Angel: Use Your Life Award which brought national recognition to SAGE. Ms. Hotaling accepted the award on behalf of SAGE on the Oprah Winfrey show.

In October 2008, Ms. Hotaling was most recently honored by the Center for Young Women's Development who gave her the Cheyenne Bell Award honoring her work with young women escaping San Francisco street prostitution.

When she spoke, Norma Hotaling used experiences from her own prostitution that moved her audience to tears while educating them about the cruelty of prostitution. She made it clear that almost everyone in prostitution had a burning desire to get out. Yet when Hotaling herself was struggling to escape prostitution, the only available services were inside jails.

At a San Francisco Health Department hearing on harm reduction Ms. Hotaling described the time in her life when she was turning tricks, was addicted to heroin and was prostituting for a pimp who frequently beat her but to whom she was attached. She described having approached a San Francisco health department program to ask for help and they told her she should resolve her heroin addiction. In the meeting, Ms Hotaling said, "You don't understand, I said I need help."

Norma Hotaling dedicated her life to what is called harm elimination in today's public health language: providing women, men, and the transgendered in prostitution not only condoms and emotional support but services informed by an understanding of the multitraumatic nature of prostitution. Rather than assuming that exit from prostitution was impossible, as some allege, Ms. Hotaling fought for the right of those in prostitution to the same quality of life that others in society have.

Ms. Hotaling's legacy is that the help she herself sought is now far better understood by public health agencies, even if budgets are not yet offering those services to the thousands of people in prostitution who seek to escape it. Her pioneering work lives on in the expansion of services for trafficked and prostituted people, and in the requirement of accountability for those who buy and sell human beings. The loss of Ms. Hotaling is felt and mourned by the thousands of people she touched in her too brief life.

Born July 21, 1951 and raised in Palm Beach Florida, Ms. Hotaling attended San Francisco State University. She graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Education. She is survived by her mother, Norma Louise Hotaling, her brother James Hotaling, and her beloved companion dog Emma. A public memorial will be announced for January. In lieu of flowers, donations are requested to SAGE Project, 1275 Mission Street, San Francisco 94103, in honor of her life and work.