

Sex trade in Jacksonville...

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prostitute I'll call Debbie who is trying hard to overcome her cycle of drugs and prostitution. She says if it wasn't for drugs, there would be no need for prisons. Her story, sadly, characterizes most victims of drug engenders.

Debbie's parents were functioning alcoholics – a military family – and she had her first drink at a friend's house when she was 12 or 13. An eighth-grade straight-A student, she wanted to be like her peers, so she accepted a smoke of marijuana from a cheerleader and football player one morning before class. Focused on the sensation she was experiencing, she never heard anything in class that day, and she never made straight A's again. She wistfully told me, "I wonder how different my life would be if someone had got hold of me then and pointed me in the right direction. I would have gone to college and had a good career."

Cocaine is derived from the coca plant, grown mostly in Bolivia and Columbia and imported to the US as powder. It is divided, diluted and sold on the streets. Users snort the powder up their noses, smoke "crack" in glass pipes or inject a solution into their veins. Smoking the oily vapors from crack produces a quicker "high" than snorting the powder, but none lasts longer than 15 to 30 minutes.

Instead, Debbie continued using drugs and was introduced to cocaine before she graduated from high school. She held such jobs as bank teller before becoming an exotic dancer. Supporting her cocaine addiction eventually outgrew her earning ability and, at age 30, she became a prostitute. Now 41, she wants more than anything to stay clean, have a home and family and live a life free of drugs and illicit sex. She works, attends daily AA meetings and a local church. She said she cannot take one drink, because she would then want drugs, which would lead straight back to the streets. (Editor's note: Before the paper went to press, Debbie was back on the street. Her recent employer said he has tried for two years to help her get her life straight. He feels especially bad for her

because she has so much potential, all wasted because of drugs.)

Success Story – Some DO escape

Mary (not her real name) has been clean almost 10 years. She started at age 12 getting high on prescription drugs and alcohol, but didn't start using cocaine until she was 20. Trapped in an abusive marriage, the first time she prostituted herself was when her husband was arrested for murder and she feared his friends would kill her. Seeking anonymity on the streets, she quickly discovered she could make enough money to supply her needs.

Homeless four years, her goal each day was to get a room for the night and to buy drugs. If a john would pay for a motel room, when he was gone she could entertain others, making the night even more profitable. She said many prostitutes also take advantage of this opportunity to steal money from the men.

(Anderson told me about a pair of lesbians who worked in tandem - one on the bed with the customer and the other beneath it, stealing his money, credit cards, car keys, etc. Mary knew one woman who could, with her toes, take a man's wallet from his pants while he was 'busy,' extract his money and replace the wallet.)

When Mary's husband was released from jail and he learned how lucrative her new profession was, he forced her to continue. She experienced many violent incidents during her years on the street and estimates she was raped at least 200 times, some of those gang rapes. Sometimes she would kick open a car door and escape, only to be picked up by another man who promised to help her, then would do the same thing. She once was left beside the road for dead, so far out of town it took her three hours to walk to civilization.

Finally, with the combined intervention of River Region Human Services and Hubbard House, the concern of a relative who took her to church every week, and with God's help, she escaped her prison of drugs and violence. Today she is happily married, has a great job and lends her insight and experience to help others in the community who exist where she once did. She considers her life now nothing less than a miracle.

Decoys attract the johns



This is a dramatization of an arrest taking place during a police undercover operation.

The other side of the sex trade is men who seek sex for pay. I went out the next day with the Vice Squad as they placed 'decoys' – young policewomen wired with transmitters – and arrested the men who sought their favors.

I rode with Detective Ford who parked discreetly a short distance away from the young officers, not only for their protection, but to tape their conversations and describe the men and their vehicles. Sgt. Anderson was also within

vision range, and two patrol officers in marked cars were nearby, but out of sight. When a deal was made – all for oral sex for \$20 – the patrol officers would quickly drive to the scene and make the arrest. The

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**To read this exhaustive report on the sex trade in Jacksonville, log on to www.jcci.org.*

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