

Sister Terry Dodge: the force behind Crossroads, Inc.

In the quiet streets of the Village, nestled in a shaded grove of oak trees, sits a modest two-story house. Weathered gray shingles make the house easy to miss, yet hard to forget.

It is a comfortable house. It is a house of new beginnings and change. It is a house that is welcoming and homey. It is in this house that Sister Terry Dodge spends her days and nights.

Crossroads, Inc., established in 1975, is a residential program for women who have been incarcerated. At no cost to residents, the 6-month program helps women “move towards self-sufficiency” and become re-established in the community.

“We’re giving them the chance to make change in their lives,” said Sister Terry. “It is a new beginning for the women.”

Through group counseling, support and education the incarcerated women, who have often been subjected to spousal abuse and molestation, tackle issues such as anger management, finances and substance abuse. According to Sister Terry, the main goal of the program is for the women to get back into the workforce.

“It helps their self-esteem to be doing something productive,” said Sister Terry. “It all boils down to self-esteem.”

Born and raised in nearby Lakewood, Sister Terry has been the Executive Director at Crossroads, Inc. for the past 18 years.

“I do everything from picking up trash to raising money,” she said. “You name it and I’ve done it. I’m very much a working executive.”

Prior to her work at Crossroads, Inc., Sister Terry taught English to elementary and high school students in Woodland Hills.



Sister Terry Dodge is the executive director of Crossroads, Inc. in Claremont. COURIER photo by Gabriel Fenoy

While teaching, Sister Terry’s brother was in and out of jail. She spent a lot of time visiting him when the rest of her family was oblivious to his whereabouts. After spending years in prison, Sister Terry knew her brother was serious about changing his life and she wanted to help.

“He came to a point in his life where he wanted to make a change but didn’t know how,” she said.



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SISTER TERRY DODGE continued from page 11

Upon researching transitional programs for her brother, Sister Terry was appalled by the number of negative people she came across.

"They judged him on his past rather than what he wanted to do in his future," she said. "It was all they were willing to look at."

Enraged by the dismal opportunities available to the incarcerated, Sister Terry knew that she had to do something about it. Initially she wanted to work with men because of her brother, but because she was a woman she wasn't able to get hired in the Los Angeles area.

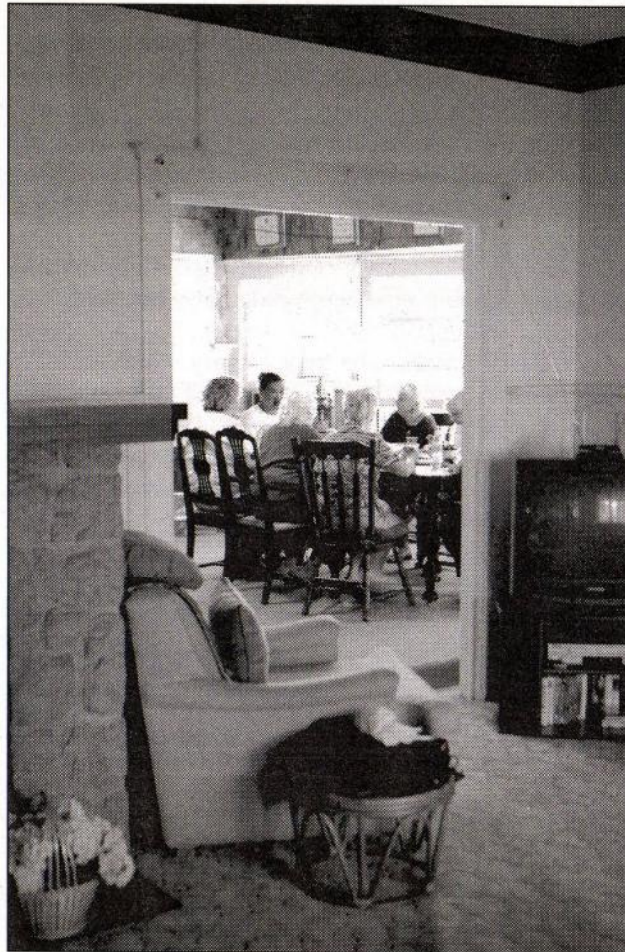
Sister Terry then moved to Oakland for a year where she volunteered for Catholic charities at juvenile detention centers. While working for the Ministry, she visited a women's prison once a week where she talked to women about their lives.

"While listening to their stories for that year, my focus changed," said Sister Terry.

One day Sister Terry saw an ad in the National Catholic Reporter for a position open at Crossroads, Inc, and the rest is history.

"We're working with people to see them succeed," she said. "What greater reward can you get?"

According to Sister Terry, an average of 23 women come through the 5 bedroom house each year and,



Women share a meal inside of the Crossroads house in Claremont. The residential program was established in 1975.

COURIER photo by Gabriel Fenoy

over the past 6 years, 86 percent of the women who have completed at least 3 months of the Crossroads program remain self-sufficient today.

"We work with women," she said. "Not ex-cons, not ex-murders or felons, but women. We see the women, not necessarily her crime, but her potential."

Over the years Sister Terry admits that raising money has been the most difficult part of her job and that it is a "constant, constant process." Crossroads, Inc. is a non-profit organization that receives donations from former residents and contributors such as the Ahmanson Foundation and the Los Angeles County Community Services Block Grant Program.

This March, Crossroads, Inc. will be holding their annual fundraising dinner for the Claremont Community Foundation. The women will be preparing the dinner in the Crossroads, Inc. home with the tools they used in prison, including "stingers."

"Anyone who has been to jail knows what a stinger is," said Board President Judy Ott-McGoon, laughing.

**SISTER TERRY DODGE
continues on the next page**

SISTER TERRY DODGE
 continued from the previous page

Immersion heaters, known in the big house as “stingers,” are wand-like heating devices used as impromptu ovens. Last year, while the guests were eating, the women demonstrated how they made the delicious cuisine that included tamales and apple pie.

“Their mouths were open,” said Ott-McGoon. “They were just amazed!”

“Yeah, we had a lot of fun,” added Sister Terry, smiling.

Sitting in the cozy living room of the Crossroads, Inc. home, countless holiday cards hang on the walls of the room. Some of the cards, Sister Terry said, are from former residents.

“The notes that come with their donations are so touching,” she said.

Recently Sister Terry received a “beautiful” letter from a woman in Oregon who was a resident at Crossroads, Inc. in 1986. After 17 years she decided

to reapply for a pardon upon receiving the Crossroads, Inc. newsletter. The monthly newsletter inspired her to take further steps to change her life by clearing her record.

“Even though she has done nothing but go forward and succeed, she is still being judged by her past,” said Sister Terry.

Lace curtains adorn the large, sunny windows. Magazines are strewn across the coffee table and the laughs of women can be heard in the kitchen as Sister Terry reflects on her experiences at Crossroads, Inc.

“I don’t have any of the answers,” she said. “The answers are there in every woman.”

— Whitney Clark

Crossroads, Inc. offers a variety of volunteer opportunities to enhance the lives of women as they transition to the community. Your time and dedication helps women leave the revolving door of prison, substance use, and homelessness to become self-sufficient community members.

Volunteers are needed in the following areas: Garden Project, Clothing Boutique, Food Drives, Fundraising Volunteers, Clerical Volunteers

Please call Crossroads at (909) 626-7847 for more information and about ways to get involved.

Help the women.