



Press Release

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Graduation Is the Celebration of a New Beginning

The Women's Center of Greater Cleveland is proud to announce the graduation ceremony for clients that have successfully completed the alcohol and other drug treatment curriculum. The graduation is scheduled for Wednesday, May 25th beginning at 4pm at the Hilton Garden Inn, Cleveland. The ceremony will be followed by a reception for graduates, family members and community leaders. Margaret Bernstein, columnist with *The Plain Dealer*, is the Commencement Speaker.

Angela is one of fifty-three women that will be graduating from the Women's Center of Greater Cleveland's drug and alcohol treatment program. Angela's addiction began at the age of three. "My grandfather thought that it was funny to give us beer and watch us stagger around drunk," said Angela. Like many addicts, Angela was introduced to alcohol at a young age by a family member and then progressed to marijuana. At the age of nineteen she discovered crack cocaine.

"I was just so tired," said Angela. That is when she found the Women's Center. She was tired of being homeless, losing custody of her children, unemployed, having periods of incarceration and being ill. Angela was prepared to be honest and seek sobriety. As Angela graduates, she will be celebrating seventeen months of sobriety. She has secured her GED and will begin taking classes at Cuyahoga Community College in the Fall. Through her sobriety, Angela has regained relationships with her daughters and grandchildren.

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Each year approximately 300 women are engaged in alcohol and other drug treatment at the Women's Center. After successfully completing the program, women leave our doors with a renewed sense of hope and direction in their lives. The Women's Center operates with the mantra of Treating Addiction...Liberating Lives. The impact of the formal graduation is a visible reminder of the individual client's liberation from the impact of addiction on every aspect of their life.

The Women's Center of Greater Cleveland is a State certified intensive outpatient treatment facility for women and their families seeking treatment for alcohol and other drug addictions. "The Women's Center is delighted to serve as the conduit to provide comprehensive and individualized programming for women to welcome a new beginning," said Mary Jane Chichester, Executive Director.

With the trial of accused serial killer Anthony Sowell Addiction scheduled to begin early next month, the graduation serves as an affirmation to the Community that healing is possible. Women are taking back their personal power and healing.

Addiction remains the common factor among the victims of Imperial Avenue. Addiction is manifested differently between women and men. For more than 90% of female addicts, they have experienced or witnessed violence. Without adequate treatment of the trauma, many women develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Some of the symptoms of PTSD include:

- Intrusive, upsetting memories of the event
- Flashbacks (acting or feeling like the event is happening again)
- Nightmares (either of the event or of other frightening things)
- Feelings of intense distress when reminded of the trauma
- Intense physical reactions to reminders of the event (such as pounding heart, rapid breathing, nausea, muscle tension, sweating)

For many women, alcohol and drug abuse becomes a coping mechanism. "If she self-medicates, she will not re-experience the event or perhaps is able to sleep though the night," Chichester said. Women often experience shame with their addiction and are able to hide and keep their addiction a secret from even those closest to them. The motivation to keep it a secret may include: lack of insurance or funds for the treatment;

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fear that she may lose custody of her children; as the caretaker of the family, how can she disclose her addiction; and the burden of the shame.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), it is estimated that 6.5 million American women are diagnosed with substance abuse or dependence. Addiction is a progressive disease.

Each year, complications of addiction claim 200,000 women's lives. This figure represents four times the number of women that die from breast cancer. Without treatment, women die. The Women's Center has incorporated trauma services to address the specific traumas while treating the addiction.

The Women's Center operates a non-profit outpatient drug and alcohol treatment facility for medically indigent women and their families. For additional information concerning the graduation or addiction, the telephone number is 216-651-1450. The Women's Center's website offers a self-test to evaluate the signs and symptoms of addiction. Please visit the website at www.womensctr.org.

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