

## Second Chance at Life

**A member of AFG's New Choices program shares how she left her life of drug use and prostitution and now works to inspire others to transform their lives**

"A trick and crack—that was life for me before I became involved with AFG," Della remembers. Looking at the gently smiling woman with a kind face, you would never know the pain and obstacles she has had to overcome in her life.



Now, Della is a New Choices Assistant in AFG's Safe Choices Program. AFG's unique Safe Choices Program is one of the few comprehensive programs in the country that

serves girls and women involved in prostitution. The program was recently featured on the Today Show and MSNBC (see "Briefings" for more details). Della is a shining example of what the program works to accomplish—to provide women who want to exit prostitution with the tools

they need to lead successful lives.

### 8 years old and on the street

But Della's life wasn't always so positive. "The first time I hit the street, I was eight years old," she recalls. "When my mother thought I was going to school, I was up on the block trying to sell something." Della saw prostitution as her only way to escape poverty.

Beyond facing poverty, Della had no stability at home. "I wasn't caring about me, my mother never cared about me. My self esteem was low," she remembers. She never felt supported by her family, and was constantly shifted from house to house along with her siblings, which numbered in the double digits. Her father was never a strong presence in her life.

By the time she was 18, she was on the streets full time and was addicted to drugs. Della recalls that all she cared about was turning enough tricks to buy her next fix of the drug.

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## Uncommon Courage

### AFG's 2011 Role Model Dinner Inspires

"In celebrating their uncommon courage, we renew our determination to be here for that girl who, tonight, may be unable to reach out for help, but who, tomorrow, or next month or next year, may find that reserve of moral strength, triggered by a crisis worse than she had imagined, or by a surge of resolve, or both," declared AFG CEO Amy Good at AFG's 22nd annual Role Model Dinner.

On March 31st, nearly 400 AFG supporters gathered at the Westin Book Cadillac Detroit. The evening raised \$140,000 in support of homeless and at-risk girls and young women.

In addition to silent and live auctions, the event also

honored three extraordinary women in the community: **Monica Morgan** of Monica Morgan Photography, **Valerie Newman** of the State Appellate Defender Office, and **Ann Nicholson**, community volunteer.



*Aliana, AFG speaker and Role Model Ann Nicholson*

Nicholson, in speaking of the young woman who had just introduced her to the crowd, smiled, "She is an uncommonly courageous girl, and AFG mentors many more positive, optimistic, and yes, a

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### **“She is the main reason why I left the streets”**

One day, she heard about Alternatives For Girls through a friend. Later, she met Deena Policicchio, AFG’s Outreach Director, while Deena was leading a street outreach shift. From then on, Deena and the outreach team regularly checked in on Della, giving her information, food, bottled water, and generally letting her know that they cared about her. “She’s like my mother,” Della smiles as she describes her relationship with Deena. “She showed enough incentive to care about me...She is the main reason why I left the streets.”

To this, Deena responds, “Della is the reason she left the streets. She did all of the hard work and she has every right to feel tremendous pride in what she has accomplished and will accomplish.”

When Della left the streets to join New Choices, she found herself surrounded by women from similar backgrounds. Della felt at home with the group, stating, “I didn’t think anyone else in the world did what I did.”

### **Learning to respect herself**

Della has learned many “hard skills” since joining the group, but she says that the biggest change she’s experienced has been increasing her self esteem. “I felt like I was wanted,” she says of joining New Choices. “I felt like somebody cared. Here

they don’t judge you for who you are, what you are. They’ll help you if you want the help...Now, I have more respect for myself and respect others as well.”

Della has now been clean from drugs for four years and is living in her own apartment. “I pay my bills, I’m not homeless anymore. I set goals and I accomplish them. I feel good about myself right now.”

### **“If I can do it, you can do it”**

Now, she wants to use what she describes as her “second chance at life” to help others transform their lives. “I want to let people know that if I can do it, you can do it,” she smiles. She now does street outreach with AFG’s team, and sees many of the same women she used to be with out on the streets. They all comment on the change they’ve seen in her, and she uses that as a jumping-off point to encourage them to change as well. “I want to let people know that if I can do it, you can do it,” she smiles.

*Would you like to help our Street Outreach team? AFG is looking for volunteers to help with street outreach and in our Resource Center. To learn more, contact our volunteering department at (313)361-4000 ext. 280 or [volunteering@alternativesforgirls.org](mailto:volunteering@alternativesforgirls.org) or visit [www.AlternativesForGirls.org](http://www.AlternativesForGirls.org). We are also looking for a new van for street outreach. If you or someone you know is interested in donating a van, please call (313)361-4000 ext. 223.*

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little nervous, young women just like her. Please remember, this evening is all about them and their futures.”

And, truly, the purpose of the Role Model Dinner is to ensure that homeless and at-risk young women in Detroit can continue to have powerful futures. As Demyra, one of the young women who shared her story at the dinner stated, “Thanks to Alternatives For Girls for assisting me in my journey to become the person that I am today: A young independent woman who’s serious about achieving her goals.” At AFG, we would like to thank everyone in the community who supported the dinner and continues to support us, making success stories like Demyra’s possible.

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*“After graduating from high school I feel as though I achieved something great. I have finished high school without having people influence me to drop out or have any kids. My next steps are to go to college in Georgia. I’m excited to **start a new adventure** in a new atmosphere. There I hope to excel in many more of my goals.”*

-ERICA, AFG SHELTER AND YOUNG WOMEN CHANGING COMMUNITIES

## “JUST GETTING STARTED”

13 youth in AFG’s programs graduated from high school this June, and all of them are going to college in the fall! Here they celebrate their successes and prepare for the next stage in their life’s journey. To hear from more graduates, check out AFG’s June e-newsletter!



*“Through all of the pain and the struggle I went through—my brother’s death and my mom struggling to pay bills—I was so shocked that I*

*passed my science class. I was proud that I did so that I could graduate. **I will be attending college in the fall.** My major is criminal justice and my minor is political science.”*

-RASHANDA, AFG PEER EDUCATOR

*“I don’t really look at it as being done yet, but as **just getting started.** I’m ready to go to college to become a pediatric nurse. I like helping people, especially kids. Becoming a pediatric nurse is the perfect job for what I want to do.”*

-AMBER, AFG YOUNG WOMEN CHANGING COMMUNITIES



*“Dealing with the death of my boyfriend, homelessness, and more—I’m **proud** that I was able to finish high school and deal with all of that at the same time. I leave for Tampa at the end of the month to go to college to study graphic and interior design.”*

-CAMILLE, AFG PEER EDUCATOR



*“I’m extra excited about everything now that **I have my own life to live.** I leave in September to go to culinary arts school in Kentucky.”*

-CASANDRA, AFG PEER EDUCATOR



## Alternatives For Girls

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### Briefing Room

#### **Alexis Novelty & Gifts Company 25th Anniversary**

On June 25th at 8:00 pm, Detroit-based Alexis Novelty & Gifts Company will host its 25th anniversary celebration at Orchestra Hall. The evening will include opera, food, and fun, including a performance by Sequina DuBose, soprano. A donation in honor of the event will be given to Alternatives For Girls. For more information visit [www.detroitssymphony.com](http://www.detroitssymphony.com).

#### **AFG Featured on MSNBC and the Today Show**

On Friday, May 13th Alternatives For Girls was on the Today Show to discuss our efforts to combat Human Trafficking. In case you missed it, visit [www.AlternativesForGirls.org](http://www.AlternativesForGirls.org) for a link to a 6-minute video clip from the program featuring one of the extraordinary women of AFG. AFG was also represented in the MSNBC special "Sex Slaves: Motor City," which aired on MSNBC on Sunday, May 15th at 10 pm.

#### **Silpada Jewelry Party Hosted by AFG Board Member**

On June 9th, Phyllis Riina, AFG board member, hosted a sterling silver jewelry party by Silpada Designs in her home. The party raised both funds as well as friends for AFG. We would like to thank Phyllis for opening her lovely home to us!

#### **Shoe and Book Distribution**

On June 1st, in partnership with Soles4Souls and Gleaners Community Food Bank, AFG distributed 1,000 pairs of new shoes and thousands of books to members of our community. This is the second year that AFG has partnered with Soles4Souls.

#### **University of Michigan Campus Visit**

On June 4th, AFG's Prevention program hosted a campus visit to the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor campus. 30 young women from AFG's Prevention and Shelter programs participated in the event.

*Want even more news? Sign-up for the Alternatives For Girls monthly e-newsletter. If interested, please email Rachel Murdock at [rmurdock@alternativesforgirls.org](mailto:rmurdock@alternativesforgirls.org).*