

CLASS OF 1980

Joseph V. Labolito



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TERESITA HINNEGAN

DEGREES: BSW, MSW, social work, School of Social Work, 1980, 1981

OCCUPATION: Founder, Dawn's Place

LOCATION: Philadelphia

When Teresita Hinnegan, SSW '80, '81, studied human trafficking at Trinity College in 2004, she realized the gravity of the problem in the U.S. From January 2008 to June 2010, more than 2,500 incidents of human trafficking occurred, with 48 percent involving adult prostitution and 40 percent involving child exploitation, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice. An 84-year-old Medical Mission nun, Hinnegan has made it her life's work to empower women and to stop violence against them.

A similar vision of social change led Hinnegan to Temple. After spending 14 years in Bangladesh as a midwife in the 1950s and 1960s, she became acutely aware of the problems of infant mortality and the healthcare needs of low-income mothers and babies. When she returned to the U.S. in 1969, health and welfare services were underfunded, poorly organized and impersonal.

"I was driven to learn as much as I could about the public systems that planned for and distributed health and welfare services, in addition to the political and public-policy processes that regulated them," Hinnegan says. She found a way toward her goal in the School of Social Work at Temple, where she earned both her undergraduate and graduate degrees.

After the course in trafficking, Hinnegan devised a way to help both the foreign women who are taken out of their home countries and promised jobs here, but are forced into prostitution instead, and U.S.-born prostitutes. For foreign women, language barriers and lack of citizenship complicate the danger they are in. If they were to report their situation to the authorities, they might be deported or suffer violence at the hands of the traffickers who control them. Domestic prostitutes must overcome social and cultural misconceptions about their work, such as "choosing" to end up on the streets, or the lack of accountability for illegal behavior committed by both pimps and johns.

This is where Dawn's Place becomes a life-saving resource. Hinnegan joined forces with two other nuns and two attorneys to open a safe haven for survivors of trafficking. Located in the Germantown area of Philadelphia, Dawn's Place provides women with sexual-trauma recovery therapy, access to addiction counseling, and education and life-skills training. Since it opened in 2009, 26 women have taken part in the recovery program, enabling them to have another chance in a society that formerly neglected them.

—Christine McLaughlin