

Palmerston North's haven to help former sex workers officially opens

Stuff.co.nz | January 18, 2016 | From GEORGIA FORRESTER

Rosalie Haven opens a home for sex workers who want help leaving the profession.

Women stuck in the depths of New Zealand's sex trade can seek refuge in a haven specifically designed for them.

Rosalie's Haven officially opened in Palmerston North on Wednesday.

A former sex worker, who goes under the same name as her shelter, has championed the project to house women desperate to escape the industry.

The safe house is believed to be the only refuge officially designated for sex workers in New Zealand.

Haven said some women needed help to leave the trade, to better their life and future.

"I've had this vision for quite some time, about six years or longer, of setting up a house for sex workers who want to come off the street and want to change their lifestyle, but have nowhere to go.

"They either couch-surf, stay in [the industry], or end up in the hospital saying they are depressed."

The house is equipped to shelter four women at one time, with another bed free as emergency accommodation.

Some sex trade workers needing help had been kicked out of home and relied on the work as income, she said. Others could be students with big loans needing to be paid back.

Many women were also pressured into staying in sex work by pimps and boyfriends, she said.

"Some of them can't get out because they have nowhere to go, so they're hemmed in there."

Haven herself has been off the streets for more than 20 years.

She has previously spoken out about her tough journey, being physically, mentally and sexually abused from a young age, as well as in and out of foster homes.

At the age of 15, she ran away and began working the streets, simply to survive.

She said it was hard to leave the industry and for a long time she felt as if she was just "floating around" until she made some good friends who helped her get her life back on track.

"I myself came out years ago, became Christian, and now I'm able to go back and help the ones that are in there now to come out."

While at the refuge, the women will be supported with health, budgeting and counselling services. There will also be cooking courses and education programs available through a church.

New Zealand Prostitutes Collective national coordinator Catherine Healy said from research they knew that most sex workers were in the industry for two to four years.

While most sex workers left the trade without much difficulty, about 10 per

cent of people needed assistance leaving, she said.

Healy said it was important to support women in the sex industry, while also attempting to reduce the stigma and discrimination still placed on them in New Zealand.

Palmerston North's Women's Refuge manager Danielle Berry said she was pleased to see women being supported in the community.

Haven hoped other towns and cities would look at Rosalie's Haven and create their own sanctuaries so former sex workers would have somewhere secure and safe to go.

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/88544958/palmerston-norths-haven-to-help-former-sex-workers-officially-opens>