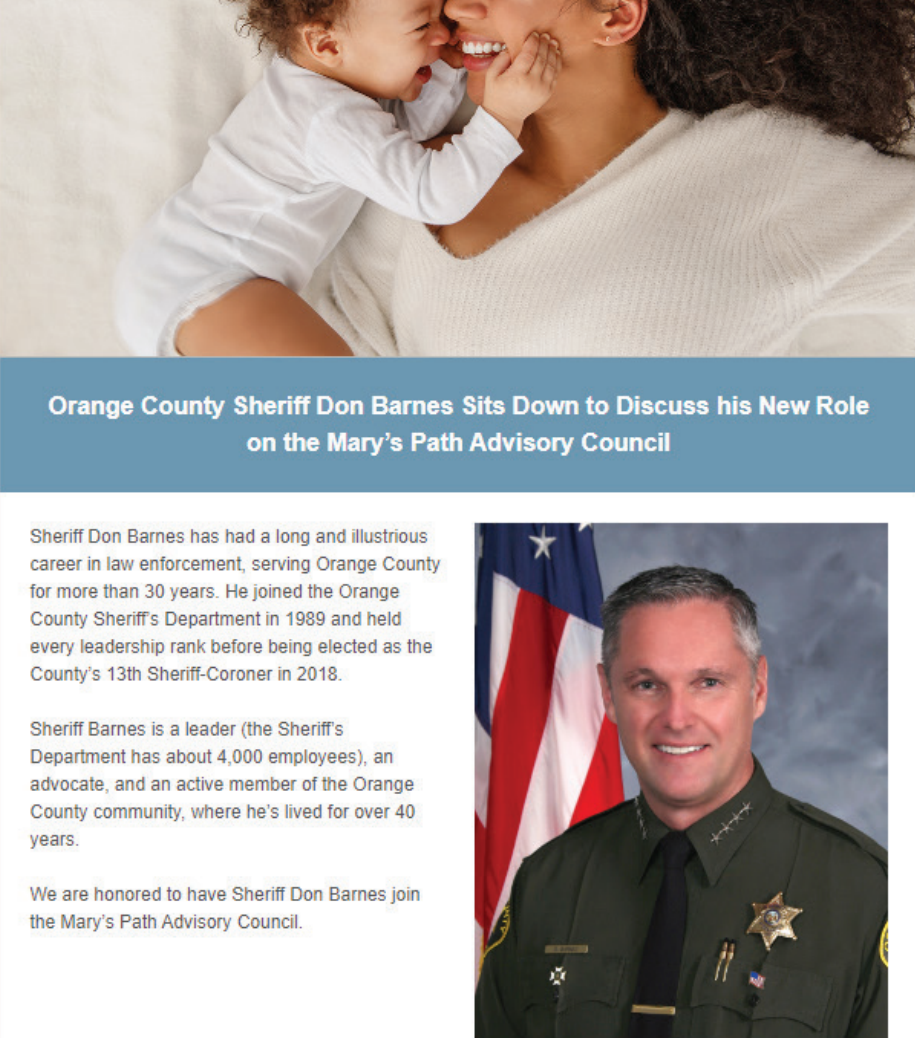


## Newsletter Summer 2022

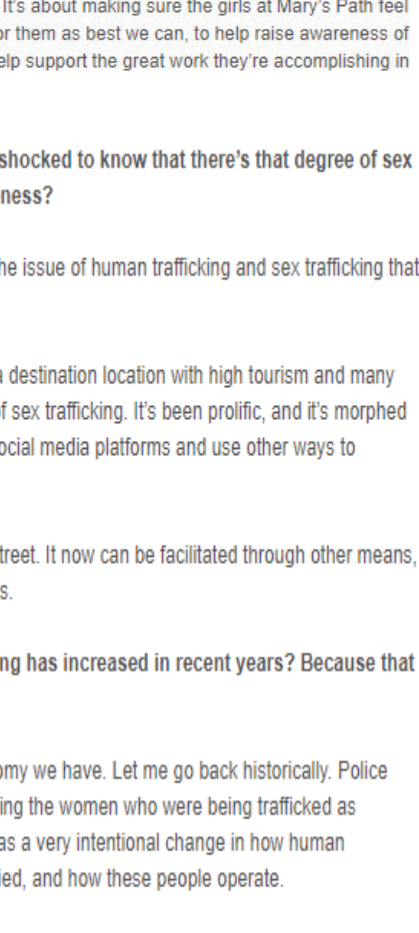


### Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes Sits Down to Discuss his New Role on the Mary's Path Advisory Council

Sheriff Don Barnes has had a long and illustrious career in law enforcement, serving Orange County for more than 30 years. He joined the Orange County Sheriff's Department in 1989 and held every leadership rank before being elected as the County's 13th Sheriff-Coroner in 2018.

Sheriff Barnes is a leader (the Sheriff's Department has about 4,000 employees), an advocate, and an active member of the Orange County community, where he's lived for over 40 years.

We are honored to have Sheriff Don Barnes join the Mary's Path Advisory Council.



Sheriff Don Barnes

#### What do you hope to accomplish in your new Advisory Council role?

**Sheriff Barnes:** Mary's Path is located within our service area. And several issues arose at their location that we helped resolve, which primed the conversation with Pat and Mary Dirk.

[Joining] for me was a combination of our physical proximity to the location, the issues they're resolving there, and the ability to raise awareness as a member of the Council about the very sensitive issue of young girls being sex trafficked and human trafficked. It's about making sure the girls at Mary's Path feel safe in that environment, that we would provide that for them as best we can, to help raise awareness of this very sensitive issue, and bring the resources to help support the great work they're accomplishing in Mary's Path.

#### Most people who live in Orange County would be shocked to know that there's that degree of sex trafficking. Is that why it's essential to raise awareness?

**Sheriff Barnes:** Yes, we want to raise awareness of the issue of human trafficking and sex trafficking that is specific to this organization.

But this is Orange County's dirty little secret. We are a destination location with high tourism and many trade shows—an unfortunate, dark cottage industry of sex trafficking. It's been prolific, and it's morphed over time, with the [ability] for people to hide behind social media platforms and use other ways to connect.

Sex trafficking is no longer young ladies walking the street. It now can be facilitated through other means, such as social media, the dark web, and different ways.

#### So social media is one of the reasons sex trafficking has increased in recent years? Because that makes it easier and kind of more covert?

**Sheriff Barnes:** Yes and no. It's an interesting dichotomy we have. Let me go back historically. Police professionals, more than a decade ago, stopped treating the women who were being trafficked as criminals and started treating them as victims. That was a very intentional change in how human trafficking was brought to the forefront, how it's identified, and how these people operate.

So we started reaching out and treating young women not as criminal prostitutes but as human trafficking and sex trafficking victims. And for us in Orange County, it was a pivotal moment when we started treating these young ladies as victims and focusing on their handlers or their pimps. We knew we were succeeding when their handlers or pimps wouldn't come into Orange County with them. They sent them in alone, which is a high-risk environment for this type of criminal enterprise.

And it gave us the opportunity to intervene with them. We knew we were successful in turning that corner. Here's one example which happened about eight-10 years ago. There were four young ladies, three of them juveniles, who walked up to one of my uniform deputies and said, "We heard you can help us." Now that's a high-risk [action] for somebody being psychologically and emotionally threatened. It's an unsafe environment for them to operate in. And just to know that they could walk up to a deputy sheriff and say, we know that you can help us—we got all four of them out of that criminal enterprise and the sex trafficking trade. So that's just one way we have changed—we now look at this as an intervention opportunity.

#### What are some of the specific initiatives you're using to combat sex trafficking?

**Sheriff Barnes:** We have a human trafficking task force, and I have deputies that do nothing but go after human and sex trafficking. There are different types of human trafficking taking place. We have a cybercrimes unit that looks at the dark web and how these people are operating. We've had sting operations where we intervened numerous times on sexual predators coming into the county, focused on young girls.

We take a broad-based, all-encompassing approach. Nothing shocks me anymore as to how these people operate. All that said, you have to change with the threat horizon. And our threat horizon is changing. [Take] terrorism as an example. If you go back two decades, we were dealing with foreign bad actors, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and others who were intent on getting in airplanes and flying into another building.

Now they have morphed into homegrown violent extremists, who are being indoctrinated via the internet, the dark web, and social media platforms to act inside the continental United States.

And the same holds true with human trafficking. It changes around our investigative and interdiction efforts. So as we start to address the problem as it exists, in how they recruit or operate on electronic media and in a physical environment, every time we do something that disrupts their criminal enterprise, they pivot and do something else. So we always have to stay current with them or try to get ahead of the curve to make sure that we are as intentional in our efforts to curb this dark and disturbing existence.

And we do that by getting the right people. I'm blessed to have such great people who work for me. Orange County is blessed to have such great peace officers who are doing a yeoman's job of getting out ahead of this.

That said, there is still an overwhelming number of people, often young, who end up being exploited.

#### Is this all over the county, or is it more prevalent in certain areas?

It depends. The convention center [area] and high tourism hospitality locations have people coming in from all over. But it also exists throughout the county in motels and sometimes even in houses where people run an operation. So it's not as simple as saying it's in one place. It's wherever the individuals perpetuating the sex trafficking trade go, and we go where they take us.

#### Is your job more challenging because we have a high prevalence of people from other countries coming into Orange County?

**Sheriff Barnes:** Yes. For example, during the Super Bowl in Los Angeles, we got spillover tourism here. We conducted very intentional operations and arrested dozens of people trying to take advantage of the sex trade and sex trafficking. So, we had great outcomes, if you will, for all the wrong reasons. It goes to show you how situational this environment is.

Our goal is to obviously get to these young people, many of whom are under 18, and break the cycle. We're focused on anybody in this trade, but specifically for Mary's Path, our focus is on a very high-risk age group.

And more importantly, catching and holding the bad actors that perpetrate the crime is, and I hate to say this, the easy part of the equation. The more difficult part is not only treating the victims with dignity and respect but getting them back to a good place in their lives where they can get out of the cycle of being trafficked. And it's often a lot heavier lift to get these young women back in a good place.

#### And that's the beauty of Mary's Path.

**Sheriff Barnes:** That is absolutely the beauty of Mary's Path and the staff. They're doing the most difficult part of this. The prosecution is difficult because it takes cooperation and collaboration with the participating witness, often these young ladies. But once you get them to a trusting environment [like Mary's Path] where they feel safe, they can regain control of who they are. And the most challenging part of restoring them to where they have that semblance of safety and security and their basic human needs are being met is connecting them to services that get them in that better place, not just physically but mainly from the emotional abuse they've been subjected to. The psychological abuse wears a lot longer than the physical hurts that go away.

And that's part of the beauty of Mary's Path—they connect them back to a good place and give them the resources and support systems that help break the cycle and give them control of their lives back.

#### What are your hopes and dreams for the teen moms and babies at Mary's Path? And how do you see your role in improving their lives?

**Sheriff Barnes:** For me, you have to look at every opportunity where you can intervene positively and restore hope. Many of these young girls have lost the one last thing they can possess—and that's hope.

They feel there's no hope for them and no hope for their future. And restoring that hope—showing them they have a future, that there is opportunity, that they are valued—those are the most important things.

And that goes well beyond just this issue. In every issue we deal with within our community, when you take hope from somebody, you really have a lost soul. So for me, whether the issues are drug addiction, homelessness, mental health, or recidivism, all these fit under the same umbrella: restoring hope and trust, restoring people to where they have control, and connecting them to resources.

It's all the same playbook. But specifically with these young women, not only is it things they the opportunity to have a future and restore their hope, dignity, and respect—all the things they so rightfully deserve—but most importantly, it's trying to break the cycle on the front end, where young ladies aren't ever introduced into this environment. It's a twofold opportunity.

And really, it's a twofold responsibility; it's not just for us in the profession of policing. Notice I didn't say law enforcement. The profession of policing is also a community responsibility. When you see things, when you see something that's not right, intervene or make a phone call. When I say intervene, I don't mean physically. I mean taking the opportunity to report something you see that doesn't seem right.

And it's really important, in a community as affluent as Orange County, to support programs like Mary's Path, which have a proven strategy to restore these young women back to a place in their lives where they can not only break the cycle but be productive.

#### So, it's up to all of us citizens of this county that if we "see something, say something?"

**Sheriff Barnes:** We're trying to change "see something, say something" to "know something, say something" because we often discover that people know things and don't share them. If you look at school shootings, for example, in almost every school shooting, somebody is aware of the individual's intent before they act, and they didn't share that information.

#### We can all make a difference?

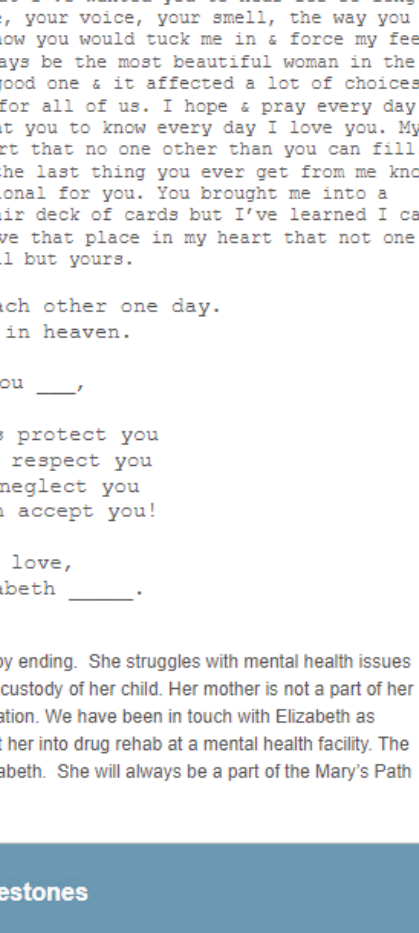
**Sheriff Barnes:** I'm amazed at what Mary's Path has accomplished. And quite honestly, I'm a little shocked that their great work hasn't gotten the acknowledgment they deserve.

Other groups do great work, too—and as an entire city, it takes a village. But in this environment specifically, it goes way beyond a village. It's going to take an entire county. We have to get on the same page and start pulling the rope in the same direction. We must stop ignoring what I call the dark, dirty secret that exists within this county and have conversations about it. We need to start intervening and adding value to programs like Mary's Path and support them appropriately.

### A Letter From Executive Director

It has been two years since I was chosen to lead Mary's Path as the new Executive Director. It's been a wild and winding road to maneuver but I am pleased to say we have survived and blossomed. Mary's Path has seen its largest growth as an organization in its history. We are now fully operational as a residential and mental health treatment facility.

The past couple of months have brought old friends back to our doorstep who have in turn introduced us to new friends with the launch of our Mary's Path Advisory Council led by the Dirk family. This is a new and important part of the work at Mary's Path as we have seen an exponential rise in the number of sex trafficking victims among our teen moms over recent years. We know that at least 80% of our young moms, and likely higher, have a history of CSEC, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Our partnerships with law enforcement agencies have become an integral piece of our services that positively impacts our ability to care for and protect our teen moms and babies. The Advisory Council will be helping Mary's Path young mothers find hope, healing, and stability as we move forward in new directions. I am excited about our future and sharing the path of our journey with you.



Nemo and I living the beach life this summer

As I look toward the future, I am excited to know we will finally be able to gather in person and celebrate Mary's Path with the return of our Gala in Spring 2023. We have a great evening planned with more details coming soon.

Our mission remains steadfast as we continue to change lives two at a time. We have new life and new families beginning at Mary's Path as we will be welcoming three new babies over the next few weeks. Along with those babies, we have a full house of toddlers. Today I had four at my door! All giggling and pointing with not quite formed words but clearly making an effort to communicate. There was a lot of clapping and tiny little feet stomping up and down while they were squealing in delight at the kiddie gate at my door. Of course, I know they are not excited to meet me. It was all about Nemo! Evidently word spreads quickly about a very cute large fluffy dog even among toddlers.

May you each be filled with the joy of Mary's Path as I am every day!

Jill Dominguez

Executive Director/President

### In Her Own Words – A new series of stories by and from our residents

A beautiful example of love and forgiveness. Elizabeth was a resident several years ago. While at Mary's Path, she found her best medium for expression in writing. She wrote this when she was coming to terms with how much she wanted to be loved by her mom as she was a mom herself at sixteen.

A letter written to mom (but never sent) about one year after baby was born

7/11/\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_ (mom),

I wanted to take this time to say I'm sorry about your sister \_\_\_\_\_. It made me realize how fast god can take a life. One of my biggest fears is that I'll never get a chance to say goodbye to you & that our relationship will remain as it stands forever. So let this letter be what I've wanted you to hear for so long. Every day I miss your laugh, your smile, your voice, your smell, the way you dance, cook, do your hair & makeup, and how you would tuck me in & force my feet in the covers every night. You will always be the most beautiful woman in the world to me. I know your past wasn't a good one & it affected a lot of choices that you've made. God has bigger plans for all of us. I hope & pray every day that you're okay, happy & healthy. I want you to know every day I love you. My tears fall from an empty place in my heart that no one other than you can fill. We may never speak again but if this is the last thing you ever get from me know that my love will always be unconditional for you. You brought me into a beautiful world. I too was handed an unfair deck of cards but I've learned I can change it for my kids. You'll always have that place in my heart that not one soul could fill but yours.

I hope we'll see each other one day.  
If not now... in heaven.

I love you \_\_\_,

may angels protect you  
neighbors respect you  
trouble neglect you  
and heaven accept you!

love,  
Elizabeth \_\_\_\_\_.

Epilogue: The story of Elizabeth does not have a happy ending. She struggles with mental health issues and addiction, and is currently homeless and has lost custody of her child. Her mother is not a part of her life and struggles with her own addiction and incarceration. We have been in touch with Elizabeth as recently as a few months ago and are still trying to get her into drug rehab at a mental health facility. The addiction is winning but we will never lose faith in Elizabeth. She will always be a part of the Mary's Path family.

### Baby Milestones



We have five toddlers! Which means lots of milestones including:

- Two birthday celebrations for two babies' 2nd birthdays.
- Many first words, giggles, and interactions with each other as they are learning to navigate their new-found friendships.
- The toddlers especially enjoy their daily visits with the dummies while walking on the trail with their teacher Holly.
- Fun all around is the "pretend play" and they like to pretend that they're sleeping (haha) during nap time.
- Two new babies arrived just since Spring.

### Happenings Around Mary's Path

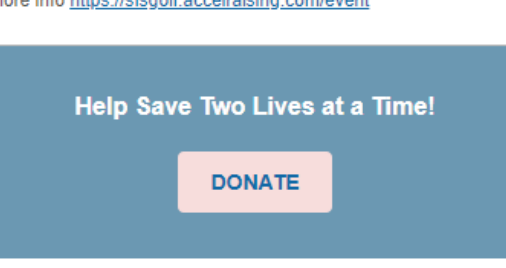
- We have a baby boom! Three new babies due in August and one in September.
- Resident Z shared her straight A report card from Mary's Academy!
- Our new expanded garden is flourishing thanks to volunteer leaders Clay and Charlie and donated items from Green Thumb Nursery (<https://www.greenthumb.com>). We are enjoying our bounty of peppers, cilantro, corn and more!
- Thanks to our fully staffed Aftercare team, 100% of our teen moms are participating in Aftercare as they and their babies venture into their new lives as a family.

WE'RE BACK!  
Mary's Path Gala

Returning in Spring 2023

Welcome to our new Mary's Path  
Advisory Council

Pat and Mary Dirk  
Don Barnes, Orange County Sheriff  
Jon Lewis, Chief of Police, Newport Beach  
Carol Gershin  
Jolynn and Pat Mahoney



Thank you Knights of Columbus St. John Paul II Council 16488 Foundation, Inc. for supporting Mary's Path. Click here for more info <https://stsgolf.accelerating.com/event>

### Help Save Two Lives at a Time!

DONATE

Mary's Path  
18221 East 17th Street  
Santa Ana, CA 92705

Email not displaying correctly?  
[View it in your browser](#)  
[Unsubscribe](#)