Medical Mission Sisters’ passion to bring healing and hope to a wounded world began 95 years ago. In 18 countries around the world we currently live among the most marginalized people, making a difference in millions of lives through medical, emotional, legal, and spiritual support. Sisters around the globe are fighting against the modern form of slavery by educating, advocating, lobbying and networking, and offering a safe place for rest and recovery for some of the most vulnerable people in the world. One of the mission priorities identified by the Sisters in North America is human trafficking.

The Thea Bowman Women’s Center is located in the heart of Kensington, a neighborhood in Philadelphia known nationally for its large homeless and addicted population. The Center is a safe place for women to grab a shower, do laundry, and build community with each other.

The facility is a "drop-in" style program where struggling women can seek refuge, counseling, a hot meal, and more. The Center's primary role is to provide a community to women where they can support each other’s needs in a nurturing judge-free zone. 10-12 women can be served at any given time. There is a dining space, a full kitchen, shower room, laundry and computer and phone access. The Center is staffed by volunteers, and one paid part-time caseworker who will help with research and referrals to shelter, housing, welfare and court resources.

The mornings (10-12:30) are drop in, offering breakfast, lunch, showers, laundry, computer and phone access. In the afternoons (12:30-2) there are opportunities for enrichment, recreation and spiritual reflection in areas developed by staff and guests. These groups are led by staff, volunteers and/or the women of the Center. There are 4-6 annual outings/field trips.

Coming from a different perspective on violence against women, Sister Teresita Hinnegan’s current project is a documentary on our society’s responsibility to teach boys how to develop into men who value and respect women. The documentary, (NOT) Buying It, explores how a society gets to the place where it is acceptable to treat women violently. It includes research and interviews, and focuses on gender roles, male privilege, toxic masculinity and mis-use of power.

The documentary is divided into a series of four parts:

(NOT)Buying It! part 1: the world’s oldest profession

Women who are prostituted are not the offenders but the victims of a crime that is rooted in domination and violence. In the commercial sex industry, pimps and sex buyers disregard and turn a blind eye to the degradation their victims suffer. Sex trafficking is a crime marked by physical and sexual violence, and psychological manipulation. Being sold for sex is a deeply violating and painful experience for the survivor. Force, fraud and coercion are used to demoralize and dehumanize victims and turn them into merchandise to be bought and sold.Gender equality is not possible while the buying and selling of women and girls for sex is considered acceptable – even inevitable. This episode exposes the horrific realities faced by those who are sold for sex and the culture surrounding prostitution, as well as the root causes and origins.

(NOT)Buying It! part 2: boys will be boys

Sexual exploitation is rooted in the assumption that men are entitled to buy women for sex. In many cultures, prostitution is condoned as meeting the physiological needs of sex for males. What society views as cultural norms and what boys pick up from an early age as “normal” distorts their sexual relationships. This perceived ‘male entitlement’ exists at all levels of society. We tolerate pornography, strip clubs, bachelor parties, locker room talk, etc., as acceptable behavior and rites of passage for young men. These unhealthy social rituals create false realities which distort men’s perspectives of women and jeopardize their physical, emotional and psychological well-being. This episode examines gender roles, male privilege, toxic masculinity and mis-use of power.

(NOT)Buying It! part 3: she asked for it

Sexuality is intrinsic to who we are and fundamental to our sense of self-worth. When our sexual integrity is violated, our whole sense of self is violated. Rape is sex against a woman’s will. The rape culture “blame the victim” mentality is pervasive in our justice system. What a woman is wearing too often leads to “she deserves it.” It doesn’t make a difference if the force is a gun to her head or a threat to tell her parents, loss of her job, or taking photos and posting them on social media. In fact, psychological force can be harder to recover from because she is more likely to blame herself. This episode exposes the risks and realities of sexual objectification and early sexualization.

(NOT)Buying It! part 4: some things never change

The final episode confronts and challenges the learned behaviors and mis-education that reinforce gender inequality and promote sexual violence. We present research, educational models and strategies to positively influence young men and women in their sexual development and empower them to develop healthy identities and relationships. We have faith in our youth as the generation that will speak up and not be complacent. They are ‘not buying’ into an antiquated, demoralizing culture that normalizes sexual violence. Together, we can change the culture and end the violence.