

Powerful Alternatives

A Newsletter for Supporters of Alternatives For Girls

SPECIAL FEATURE:

Meet Alternatives For Girls' 2021 Role Models

Alternatives For Girls prepares to honor four amazing women at this year's virtual Role Model Celebration on Wednesday, March 31st

Alternatives For Girls transitions from Role Model Dinner to virtual Role Model Celebration, due to the pandemic. AFG prepares to honor four extraordinary women at the 33rd annual event on Wednesday, March 31 from 6 -7 PM.

Alternatives For Girls, along with honorary event chair, Anne Doyle, Podcast Host, are proud to honor four women who are true role models at this year's Role Model Celebration – Racheal Allen, Founding COO, Marygrove Conservancy; Lisa Ludwinski, Head Baker and Founder, Sister Pie; Marifer Calleja, Program Manager, DTE Energy; and Agnes Hagerty, Attorney, Trinity Health. The theme for this year is: Finding Essential Connections.

We applaud Racheal, Lisa, Agnes, and Marifer for serving as examples to the girls and young women AFG serves. We hope you will join us for the 33rd annual Role Model Celebration. Tickets are available and can be purchased online at www.alternativesforgirls.org or by contacting Dawn Barrack, Director of Fund Development at dbarrack@alternativesforgirls.org

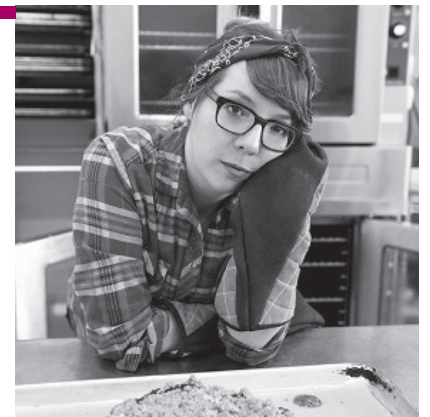


Racheal Allen,
Founding COO

Racheal Allen serves as the founding chief operations officer for the Marygrove Conservancy, a non-profit organization that manages operations and stewards the 53-acre Marygrove College campus in northwest Detroit as a resource for high-quality uses in the community. Racheal oversees the Conservancy's Prenatal to 20th Grade partnerships; campus operations; external engagement; and program development, including the Community Impact Incubator, a year-long personal and professional development program for Black leaders.

Prior to her work with the Marygrove Conservancy, she led the Downtown Detroit Ambassador Program, a cleaning and hospitality program in Detroit's Business Improvement Zone that specializes in providing supportive employment for disadvantaged workers. She also served as the senior director of Operations and Finance for the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan. She lives in Farmington Hills with her husband and five children.

Lisa Ludwinski grew up in Milford, Michigan, then studied theatre arts at Kalamazoo College before moving away to Brooklyn, New York. While there pursuing her dreams of directing, the vibrant food culture of New York naturally led to distraction that resulted in a low-budget cooking show called "Funny Side Up" that Lisa filmed in the many tiny apartment kitchens she inhabited over the course of her six-year stay. In 2012, she moved back to Michigan with dreams of opening a bakery with a big-hearted mission: make delicious food and treat the community well. Lisa launched Sister Pie out of her parent's Milford kitchen in 2012. In 2015, the bakery doors opened in Detroit's West Village. Lisa now lives a few blocks from Sister Pie with her pit bull, Ruby.



Lisa Ludwinski,
Head Baker & Founder

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Agnes Hagerty,
Attorney

Agnes Hagerty is an attorney who specializes in health care law. She worked at Trinity Health or its predecessor organizations from 1985 until 2016, when she retired as deputy general counsel. She continues to work on special projects for Trinity, one of the largest nonprofit health care delivery systems in the nation, serving diverse communities in 22 states at hospitals, long-term care facilities, clinical locations and senior residences. Agnes shares Trinity's commitment to honor the sacredness and dignity of every person and to stand with and serve those who are most vulnerable. This is perfectly aligned with the mission of Alternatives For Girls, where Agnes has been involved for more than 30 years, serving on the board, board committees and as board chair. Agnes grew up in Detroit and has a bachelor's degree in economics, a master's degree in business and a law degree, all from the University of Detroit Mercy.

Marifer Calleja serves as program manager in Public Affairs at DTE Energy, where she leads outreach efforts to the Hispanic population of metro Detroit. In her role, she works as a liaison with community stakeholders on topics such as environmental leadership, energy reliability, safety, affordability, and corporate responsibility. Her professional experience ranges from corporate and governmental sectors to volunteering on nonprofit boards. Marifer's expertise in change leadership and communications uplifts the voice of the multicultural customer—a voice she appreciates because of her own bicultural and bilingual upbringing. Marifer describes herself as a lifelong learner. She is pursuing an MBA and is interested in expanding her knowledge in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion. She has a master's degree in creativity and change leadership from SUNY Buffalo, and a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Texas at El Paso. Her greatest joy is being the mother of her daughter, Henrietta Martha.



Marifer Calleja,
Program Manager

Anne Doyle is a global speaker, author, journalist, business executive, podcast host, former elected official and lifetime change agent who has been on the front lines of women's progress for nearly five decades. She is the author of **POWERING UP!** How America's Women Achievers Become Leaders and the host of two podcasts: **POWER UP WOMEN!** and the Game Changers podcast of the International Women's Forum. She began her career as a trailblazing TV news and sports broadcaster in the 1970's and 1980's and was inducted into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame for her national leadership role in opening sports locker rooms to women journalists.



Anne Doyle,
Honorary Event Chair

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For more information on how you can be an event sponsor, please contact Dawn Barrack, Director of Fund Development at dbarrack@alternativesforgirls.org.

RENEWED HOPE IN 2021

While we greet 2021 with renewed hope and anticipation of relief from the pandemic, we at AFG remain resolute in protecting all in AFG's circle from the virus, which continues to rage. We have seen, at AFG over these past few months, some elements of the darkness that invariably precedes the dawn.

We have been vigilant in implementing CDC protocols, to keep COVID-19 at bay, because any communal living environment, including our shelter, could become a place of rapid transmission. Due to the diligence of our staff, and the generosity of many supporters, we were able to keep the virus out of our building through the fall. However, in December, a number of shelter staff and residents, and even the young child of one of our shelter residents, tested positive. We were fortunate to have had the support of the Detroit Health Department, which helped us to immediately implement mitigation measures, including frequent testing, safe quarantine and medical care for those who needed it, and guidance. I'm happy to report that all of those affected are recovering. In particular, I'm pleased to share the story of one young woman who needed to leave AFG's shelter, along with her child, to stay in the city's temporary facility for shelter residents who tested positive. She received good care and felt comfortable and safe. Our caseworkers stayed in daily communication with her, and she continued her earnest preparation, eager to jump back into her employment and educational plans as soon as she returned to AFG, two weeks later. Our great news is that our front-line staff, as well as our shelter residents, have received their vaccines.



YOUNG LEADER GONE TOO SOON

Finally, we lost a beautiful, promising, active young leader, former participant and recently-elected AFG board member, Casey Willis. The 18-year-old was a victim of gun violence in December. Casey's loss shocked and saddened many within our community, as well as former high school classmates and WSU classmates. Violent crime has escalated significantly in Detroit as in other big cities during this pandemic, a result of the many sources of economic, health, and psychological stress that have grown over the past year. This disturbing trend underscores the importance of AFG's work in providing a safe space, and building violence-prevention skills, for those we serve. We appreciate the many expressions of care and support, for those of us at AFG and, of course, for Casey's family, and all who mourn her. We will seek opportunities to celebrate and emulate Casey's life.

MISSION:

Alternatives For Girls' mission is to help homeless and high-risk girls and young women avoid violence, teen pregnancy and exploitation, and help them to explore and access the support, resources and opportunities necessary to be safe, to grow strong and to make positive choices in their lives.

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DEPARTMENTS:

Shelter and Transition to Independent Living: AFG's Shelter Program provides a stable home, counseling, and life skills training to homeless girls and young women ages 15-21 and their children. The goal is to empower them to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Outreach and Education Services: AFG's Outreach Program helps teens and women engaged in high-risk activities, such as sex work, drug use, and gang involvement, to understand the risks of such activities and transition to safe choices and healthy lives.

Community Based Prevention: AFG's Prevention Program serves girls and young women ages 7-19 who are at risk of pregnancy, gang involvement, abusing drugs or alcohol and school truancy. We engage them through after-school programs, a teen leadership program, and a summer camp.



For all you do, thank you.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT - JAMES MAIER

If you're driving around Southwest Detroit on a Wednesday night between 6:30 – 9 PM, you just may see the AFG van driving around. And, the person you'll see behind the wheel is James (Jim) Maier. Jim has been volunteering for AFG for five years, and he specifically chose the Safe Choices street outreach program.

"I found out about AFG on a website through my church," said Maier. "I was looking for a new organization, and as I was looking through their website, I noticed street outreach was one of the areas they needed volunteers. There was just something, I don't know. Once I saw they offered that, I knew right away that's what I wanted to do."

Volunteers in our Safe Choices program go out into the community twice a week, on Wednesdays, in Jim's case, and Thursdays. Their goal – to find sex workers and provide them with resources (food, bleach kits for drug use, and information about AFG), and let them know AFG is available to them, if they want help. Jim is usually joined by one or two other volunteers. There's always someone in the front window handing out bags. If there's a third person, they're in the back of the van taking notes, and looking around to make sure no one is a threat.

"We are probably the only people that are doing something good for the women we stop for, and they are so grateful for anything we have to offer, just even to know somebody cares for them," said Maier. "It's just really moving when they say "thank you" or "God bless you."

On average, Jim and the rest of the Wednesday crew make 10-15 stops a night year-round. Some days are lower, and some days are higher. The most stops he has ever made in one night was 25. Jim drives around 50 miles every Wednesday, covering the Southwest area up to John R. and 8 mile.

The ultimate goal of the Safe Choices program is to get these women off the street, and into our New Choices program at AFG.

"There have been several women who have joined the New Choices program because of us stopping and talking to them on the street, it's just so rewarding, and it makes it worth it – going every week," said Maier.



Safe Choices volunteers Marissa Graziano and James Maier



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At AFG, we respect everyone who comes to us for help – as they work towards a brighter future. So, while their stories are true, names and images may have been changed to protect their privacy. Thank you for understanding.