

## *Sister Teresita Hinnegan*

Sister Teresita Hinnegan is a member of the Medical Mission Sisters, an international community of Catholic Sisters, whose work is in health care, education, the development of women and justice for people whose human rights are denied. Sister Teresita is a nurse-midwife and has graduate degrees in social work with a major in social planning.

Sr Teresita is an icon in Philadelphia, her birthplace, where she is known to many key policy makers. She has always had a passion for teaching others to look at the "big picture" of health and illness, and especially access to health care for underserved populations, particularly women and children.

Nobody was surprised, therefore, when at the age of 80 and after retiring from a long academic career at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, she was working in inner city Philadelphia again, this time with women who have experienced violence and abuse. This was born out of her deep conviction that the structures that condone any violence against women have to be challenged at all levels, be they cultural, educational, political or religious.

With a dedicated team, Sister Teresita secured a building to develop a program that supports women affected by commercial sexual exploitation (CSE). This endeavour, Dawn's Place, is now a non-profit organization that can provide long term trauma recovery and comprehensive support services to both internationally and domestically trafficked women. Dawn's Place works on the premise that commercial sexual exploitation is a violation of human rights and that by raising public awareness through education, prevention strategies, public policy reform and community collaborations changes will come about.

Sr. Teresita's values of integrity, justice, and service to the most vulnerable people do not allow her to take credit for the many interventions she and her students have had in the lives of women – whether poor, disenfranchised, or abused. However, her colleagues have witnessed the positive outcomes of Sr. Teresita's commitment and care for such women, and how that commitment has expanded through the work of hundreds of students over the years. One colleague says it all: "her compassion for all is legendary".