



# EQUALITY NOW

## SURVIVOR STORIES

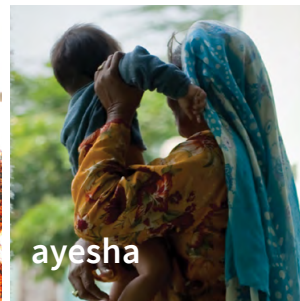
REAL STORIES. REAL CHANGE. REAL SOLUTIONS.



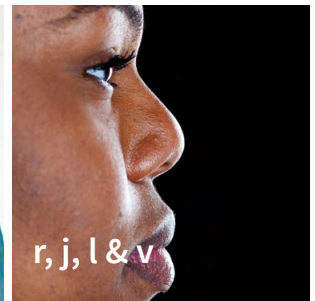
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kolab & phalla



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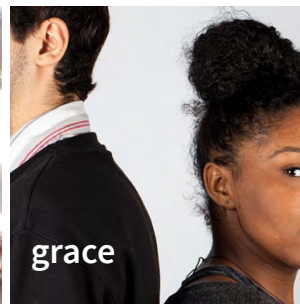
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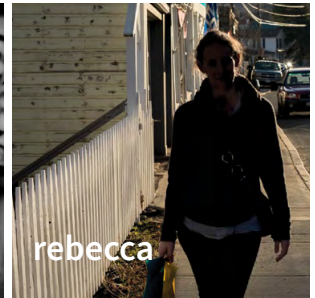
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trisha



rebecca

Survivor leadership is critical in combatting sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Survivors' voices demonstrate strength, courage and activism. Listen to their stories and advocate for change. Be a part of the solution.

# Foreword

“Listening to the voices of those who have survived any form of oppression is crucial for many reasons, one of them being that it is the truest way to get to the heart of that which has been survived. Survivor leadership exacts a heavy price, but your listening is our recompense.”

-Rachel Moran, SPACE International, Ireland

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is a criminal industry that spans the globe despite the fact that international law and the national laws of more than 140 countries criminalize it. Most often, the end destination of sex trafficking is the commercial sex industry, primarily prostitution, which is marked by widespread exploitation and violence, is linked to organized crime and perpetuates gender inequality.

Around the world, survivors’ experiences illustrate that sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation is a human rights violation that predominantly impacts women and girls. Their voices are a powerful tool to put a human face to this crime, dispel myths and encourage action; the stories they share are part of a bigger platform for change. Survivors know not only of the experiences they have lived, but have insight as to which strategies and solutions are most effective to combat the harms associated with the sex trade. Survivor leaders must be part of shaping the solution and influencing global anti-trafficking, prostitution and gender equality policies and legislation.

Equality Now’s *Survivor Stories* series debuted March 2013 to draw international attention to the experiences, needs and demands of women and girls who understand the issue of commercial sexual exploitation better than anyone, and to call on policymakers and top officials to enact policies and laws that take survivors’ voices and experiences into account. The first hand narratives document the myriad forms of exploitation and violence women and girls experience, and follow their evolution from victim to survivor, often highlighting the impact the legal framework had on the survivor. The series, and a broader #ListenToSurvivors media campaign, also highlights survivor and our NGO partners’ critical grassroots work to assist women and girls in the commercial sex industry.

We are grateful to the many courageous, outspoken survivors who generously shared their time, experience, and expertise with us, and to our fantastic partners who together with survivors work to end sex trafficking and exploitation around the world.

Thank you for listening and taking action,  
Equality Now & our partners

July 2014

*Note: All stories have been edited for length and clarity and some were translated from the survivor’s original language. Where applicable, pseudonyms have been used to protect the survivors’ anonymity. Additional information provided with the stories may be slightly altered from the original online version.*



Photo: Suzanna Finley

# alma

PHILIPPINES

PARTNER: **Buklod**

# alma

## PHILIPPINES

I walk along the streets in Olongapo City where scantily clad women pose outside entertainment clubs and beckon passersby to come inside for a “good time.” I enter one of the “videoke bars,” and find myself in a dimly lit den where foreign businessmen and locals watch inebriated women gyrate on a stage.

From the bar, I watch a Westerner buy another drink from a young Filipina whose language he does not speak. If the man wants to buy her for sex, he will pay the bar owner a fee called a “bar fine.” Looking at this young girl, I wonder how she ended up here. I wonder if she will take her customer to a back room in the bar or to her home and risk waking up any children she might have. I wonder if she’s ever been beaten or raped by her customers. Or, if she ever had to contact a “hilot” (midwife) who terminates unwanted pregnancies by violently pounding a woman’s stomach until she miscarries.

“THE SEX INDUSTRY IS A HUGE MACHINE, AND IT’S NOT EASY TO STOP. AS ONE SURVIVOR TO ANOTHER, I TRY TO COMMUNICATE THAT I UNDERSTAND THEIR FEARS AND PAIN.”

When the customer leaves to use the bathroom, I approach the girl who looks surprised and a little annoyed that I’ve intruded on her personal space. Undeterred, I tell her that I work for an organization called Buklod. “We bring women together to discuss their lives and share ideas,” I say. “You should come to our next meeting.” She looks at me quizzically and asks, “What do you know about my life?”

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1984, Olongapo City was a thriving U.S. military base and my name was not Alma but “Pearly.” I was a single-

mother of two young children struggling to support my family by waitressing seven days a week. The clubs were always busy when the military ships came in.

As a child I dreamed of becoming an accountant. When my brother promised to help pay my tuition, I left Manila for Olongapo City where he lived. Once I arrived though, he admitted that he had no intention of helping me attend college. Instead, he hoped I would “strike it lucky” and marry an American serviceman so I could support our family. After a few months there, I grew frustrated by the lack of jobs and finally agreed to waitress near the U.S. Naval Base at Subic Bay. My brother tried to force me to accompany the servicemen when they requested my company, but I refused.

\* \* \* \* \*

One day, a serviceman offered the manager a “bar-fine” for me. I refused, saying that I was just a waitress. The manager told me that if I didn’t go, I would lose my job. He threatened to withhold my transfer documents, papers releasing me from his employment and allowing me to work elsewhere. I was scared that my children and I would end up homeless and hungry, so I reluctantly agreed. The American wanted to rent a hotel room, but I told him to give me the money he would spend on a room and accompany me home instead. I sent my children to my parents because I did not want them to see what their mother was doing to make a living.

I tried to avoid doing this again, but my daughter fell ill and I needed money for her medical expenses. During my four years at the club, I had about 30 American “boyfriends.” In the early 1980s, there were no health programs and nobody knew how to use contraceptives. The Amer-Asian child population boomed. I gave birth to my third child knowing he would never meet his father.

Around that time, we started hearing about AIDS. The American guys would line up for condoms before

disembarking their ships. However, some of them would just blow the condoms into balloons and toss them around. We couldn't require a customer to use a condom because he would say, "I paid good money" and get his way.

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1984, I befriended an American woman named Brenda Proudfoot, who was helping women escape prostitution and sex trafficking. She invited me to join a support group where I met others in similar situations. After several meetings I knew this was my chance to finally exit the hellish world of prostitution.

In 1987, I co-founded Buklod ng Kababaihan and spoke with women at the bars about our services. My employer grew frustrated with my absences, but I felt so empowered that I continued speaking out against injustices at work. I now knew my rights as a woman and a human being, and was unwilling to compromise any longer. My employer fired me, calling me "a Communist." I was unable to find another job because he withheld my transfer permit, but thankfully, Buklod hired me as an organizer. The salary was low, but I jumped at the opportunity. I was so happy to be free from prostitution.

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**i**  
**Read about  
the role of  
U.S. military  
in growing the  
commercial  
sex industry  
on page 4.**

Society's understanding of human trafficking and prostitution needs to change. In my country, people believe that prostitutes are criminals and buyers are the victims. This is wrong. When women are not given equal opportunities for employment or education, their options are limited and they grow desperate. Because women are often viewed as powerless sex objects they are constantly driven into the sex industry.

At times, I too believed that I only existed for men's pleasure. Filipina women are often referred to as "little brown fucking machines" by servicemen. Once I asked a customer, "Why do you like Filipina women so much?" He replied, "Because the women are cheap, way cheaper than Japanese women. And besides, you can do what you like. Here the women are always smiling. They pretend that they like it." We need to change this thinking and educate young girls about the abuses of the sex industry, to let them know that they do have choices. Women are human beings, not commodities to be bought and sold.

As I leave the videoke bar, I'm unsure if the young woman will attend our next meeting. She is one of thousands of prostituted Filipina women. The sex industry is a huge machine, and it's not easy to stop. As one survivor to another, I try to communicate that I understand their fears and pain. I try to tell my sisters that Buklod is trying to create a different future.



# About Buklod

In 1987, Alma Bulawan helped found a nonprofit organization called Buklod ng Kababaihan, which means “Women Unite” in the local Tagalog language.

Buklod seeks to empower commercially sexually exploited women to leave the industry; create civil society initiatives to support survivors as they try to rebuild their lives; and lobby politicians to hold buyers of sex accountable for their crimes.



In 1993, Alma helped file a class-action lawsuit against the U.S. Navy for medical and educational expenses on behalf of thousands of impoverished Amer-Asian children fathered and abandoned by U.S. servicemen in the Philippines. Alma's third child was fathered by an American Marine corporal named Ed, who stopped corresponding with her once she revealed her pregnancy to him.

*Above, Alma, on right, with Buklod's Vice President (left) and a program participant (middle). Photo courtesy of Buklod.*

## i

### Role of the U.S. Military in Growing the Commercial Sex Industry in the Philippines

In the 1980s, the U.S. Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines was the largest U.S. military base outside of the U.S. with an estimated 500 million USD generated by the brothels surrounding it. The nearby city of Olongapo soon became economically dependent on the prostitution of their women and children to sailors from this naval base. Local traffickers and brothel owners engaged in the business of buying and selling women and girls to meet the demands of the servicemen stationed there.

While the U.S. bases were closed in the early 1990s, they have left behind booming red light districts<sup>1</sup>.

Today, the sex industry, which includes sexually exploited women and children, caters to the U.S. servicemen still present in the Philippines<sup>2</sup>, local men from all walks of life from blue-collar workers to wealthy businessmen, and sex tourists<sup>3</sup> from countries including the U.S., the Netherlands and nearby countries including China, Korea and Japan.

1 Yu, Katrina. "Special SBS report: Child sex tourism in the Philippines." *Diversity Diaries*. 2 March 2012. Web. <http://diversitydiaries.com/2012/03/02/special-sbs-report-child-sex-tourism-in-the-philippines/>

2 "Philippines agrees to 10-year pact allowing US military presence." *The Guardian*. 27 April 2014. Web. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/27/philippines-us-military-presence-china-dispute>

3 [http://www.ecpat.net/sites/default/files/global\\_monitoring\\_report-philippines.pdf](http://www.ecpat.net/sites/default/files/global_monitoring_report-philippines.pdf)



Photo: AFESIP

# kolab & phalla

CAMBODIA

PARTNER: **AFESIP**

# kolab & phalla

CAMBODIA

***Kolab** does not know who her real parents are. She studied to grade 5, then was forced to work as a family servant, in a karaoke bar, and to sell drugs and sex. **Phalla** studied to grade 12, then was sold to a brothel by her grandmother. Here are their stories. (Names have been changed to protect the survivors' privacy.)*

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## What was your childhood like in Cambodia?

**KOLAB:** I was born in 1991. My parents treated me like a house servant and frequently beat me for no reason. Since they were farmers, I had to help them in the rice paddies after finishing the housework. When I turned 7, I learned that my “parents” were actually foster parents. They told me that my biological parents had sold me shortly after I was born for the equivalent of 1,000 U.S. dollars since they could not afford to raise me, which was very hurtful.

**PHALLA:** I was born in 1988. When I was 20, my father died and we had nobody to provide for our family, so I had to stop my schooling and move in with my grandmother.

I WAS HOPELESS AND THOUGHT:  
THE WORLD IS SO BIG WITH MANY  
GIRLS AND WOMEN, WHY HAS THIS  
PROBLEM HAPPENED TO ME?

## After leaving your families, where did you go next?

**KOLAB:** When I turned 13 years old, my foster parents sent me to a woman in the capital city, Phnom Penh. I worked for this woman and her family every day for the equivalent of \$12.50 U.S. a month. The woman forced me to clean, cook, and wash non-stop. I had no time to

rest, not even on the weekends. One day, two months after I arrived, the woman went out and I stayed home babysitting her children. Her husband called me into his room and tried to have sex with me. I started yelling, but he raped me anyway.

**PHALLA:** After living with my grandmother for a month, one day she said, “My baby, tomorrow I will go to visit Kampong Som, do you want to go with me?” I replied, “Yes! Oh, Grandma I want to see the sea.” When we arrived in Kampong Som, my grandma brought me into the village to a nice house, which she said belonged to a friend. We stayed there for a few days and I saw many cars approach the house and then leave with young women. On the 4th day, my grandma introduced me to the house owner and said: “I need my granddaughter to stay here for several days, then I will come to bring her home.” The house owner said: “OK! Don’t worry!” I waited for my grandma for more than several days but she never came back.

## How did you get trapped in the commercial sex industry?

**KOLAB:** To escape the home where I was basically a servant, I went to Phnom Penh province where a friend told me I could find work. When I arrived, I didn’t know where to go. I was standing by the taxis when two men asked me where I was going. I told them I didn’t know. They said that if I didn’t have any relatives, I could stay with them. I had few choices and, since they were older, I assumed they were safe to live with so I agreed. When we arrived to their home, I saw 2 men and 15 girls who were strung out on drugs. I felt afraid, but the man told me everything would be alright. He introduced me to a man called Tiger II who I later learned owned the place and was the leader of a gang. After a week, Tiger II ordered me to have sex with a man on video but I refused. He said: “You cannot refuse. You must do this for me.” He ordered someone to inject me with drugs.



Then I could no longer refuse because I had no control. I had to do what they wanted which was to be filmed having sex with Khmer men, Vietnamese men and Japanese men. During this time, I also had to have sex with Tiger II and members of his gang. This torture continued for 20 days and they subdued me with drugs. I was hopeless and thought: The world is so big with many girls and women, why has this problem happened to me?

**PHALLA:** I kept looking for my grandma, but the house-owner said she wouldn't be coming back because she had sold me. She told me I must make money but I couldn't leave the house. Then, she forced me into the room and locked the door. After that, I didn't sleep, I cried and listened. That night, I heard someone turn the lock and I said: "Hello! Who are you?" He said he was my Uncle and that he needed me to do something for him. I was afraid and didn't want to see anyone. I asked him why he'd come here. He said he needed me to go to Heaven with him. Suddenly, I was fully alert. When he touched me, I immediately pushed him away. He pushed me onto the bed and punched me. My mouth began bleeding and I called for help, but no one answered. He put his arm on my mouth to muffle my screams and then ripped off my clothes and raped me. When he'd finished I asked him, "Why have you done this?" He replied, "You are mine for several days. So, I can do whatever I want to you because I gave a lot of money to your boss. Don't be angry." Then he left the room.

I FELT LIKE AN ANIMAL IN THE ZOO.... I HAD VERY LOW SELF-ESTEEM, HARMED MYSELF AND WAS QUICK TO ANGER. I FELT HOPELESS BECAUSE I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING OF MY LIFE. I WAS A SLAVE PROSTITUTE.

## What was your life like in the sex industry?

**KOLAB:** Tiger II ordered me to sell drugs from 9:00pm to 11:00pm and then sell my body from 11:00pm to

**i**  
Read about  
sex trafficking  
in Cambodia  
on page 8.

4:00am. I was ordered to steal, pickpocket, and cheat my customers by taking their money and motorbikes. They expected me to make \$200 to \$300 per night; if I did not, they punished me by stripping and beating me with a stick until I fainted, electrocuting me, cutting me and

pouring salt water on the cuts, and placing my hands into a bamboo press for up to 20 minutes. I received these punishments several times and still have the scars. To numb the pain, I began taking more drugs, like yama and acetima-mint, which made me feel invincible and unafraid. Tiger II and his gang watched me carefully and punished me for anything I did wrong. They forced me to sleep with as many as 50 customers a day. I had to give Tiger II all my money, but I secretly hid \$5 from each customer. Most of the customers thought I was dirty. If I tried to confide in them about Tiger II, they accused me of lying.

**PHALLA:** After 3 months in the first brothel, I was sold to a new brothel owner in Kosh Kong. The brothel owner and the "guests" forced me to have sex copying styles they saw in sex videos. In the first month, I had 10 to 15 guests a day. I felt like an animal in the zoo. I couldn't go anywhere, I never got the money — they gave me drugs, curses and beatings instead. Sometimes, they checked me and took money that some guests passed directly to me. I quickly became a drug user because it helped ease my distress but ultimately the drugs didn't help me lose my pain. I had very low self-esteem, harmed myself and was quick to anger. I felt hopeless because I didn't think anything of my life. I was a slave prostitute.

After 2 months in Kosh Kong, I was sold to a brothel in Thailand where they forced me to have sex with 20 to 30 men because I was new and pretty. I worked in this brothel for 4 months. One day, I met a Khmer man who helped me escape with 4 others back to Cambodia. I lived with him in Phnom Penh for a week after which he took me to work in a karaoke bar.

## How did you escape the sex trade?

**KOLAB:** I worked for Tiger II in both Phnom Penh and Kampong Cham for almost 2 years. Eventually I gained their trust, and they watched me less carefully.

One night, I took the money I had saved and stole an additional \$500 from the boss in order to run away with a friend. We went to Phnom Penh and sold vegetables, but the gang found me and forced me to return to the brothel. I was forced to make more sex videos, and again, I ran away. I tried to find work in a factory, but nobody would hire me so I started working at the Hing Hing Massage Parlor. One day, in December 2009, the police arrived and closed down the parlor. I was very scared that I would be arrested, but they told me they wanted to help me.

The police sent me to the Accommodation of Social Affairs department so I could learn some skills and get a proper job. After meeting the non-profit organization **AFESIP Cambodia** there, I finally was able to leave the sex industry, where I never wanted to be in the first place. I have decided to study hairdressing in the AFESIP center to make a living. I'd like to become a good hairdresser or a staff member of AFESIP, so I can help other victims.

**PHALLA:** At the karaoke bar, I wasn't allowed to go out anywhere. After a week, I ran away but they arrested me and sent me back. I was put in a room under ground and beaten by the boss for a few days. Then, they sold me to a foreigner. I was with him for 3 days but I didn't run away because I wanted to gain my boss' confidence. After another month back at the karaoke bar, the boss trusted me enough to allow me to go out unsupervised. 2 months later, I met a woman that used to live with AFESIP who told me about the organization and gave me their phone number. I went to the clinic to ask for help and now stay at their center, where I study sewing, English and computer. I would like to become a lawyer because I want to help other victims.

## About AFESIP

Established in 1996, AFESIP provides rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration services to survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation in Cambodia. The organization operates three residential centers for survivors in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Kompong Cham provinces. AFESIP offers legal assistance and representation to victims, as well as vocational skills training courses including in sewing, weaving and hairdressing as well as psychological counseling, medical care and other therapies.

The organization conducts outreach and education not only to victims of sexual exploitation but also to buyers of sex, and emphasizes the importance of addressing demand.

*Hairdressing course at AFESIP.  
Photo courtesy of AFESIP.*



### i

## Sex trafficking in Cambodia

A 2011 study<sup>1</sup> completed by End Child Prostitution, Abuse and Trafficking (ECPAT) in Cambodia found that 92% of identified sex trafficking victims were either children or young people (up to age 25), with 75% of them under the age of 17. Just under half of the victims were recruited by someone the victim knew very well (neighbor, employer, friend or family member).

<sup>1</sup> ECPAT Cambodia, *Database Report on Rape, Sexual Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in Cambodia*.



Photo: Bernard Henin

# ayesha

INDIA

PARTNER: **Apne Aap**

# ayesha

INDIA

I approach the petrol pump and see a tall, confident young woman directing traffic. “Come again,” she says to a customer as he drives away. Dignified and independent, she lives the life I dreamt for her. Our eyes meet and this business woman becomes my child. I extend my arms to pull her in close. “I am so proud of you,” I whisper, as I remember all the times I resisted the pimps who tried to prostitute her.

WHEN PEOPLE TELL ME THAT WOMEN CHOOSE THIS LIFE, I CAN'T HELP BUT LAUGH. DO THEY KNOW HOW MANY WOMEN LIKE ME HAVE TRIED TO ESCAPE, BUT HAVE BEEN BEATEN BLACK AND BLUE WHEN THEY ARE CAUGHT? TO THE MEN WHO BUY US, WE ARE LIKE MEAT. TO EVERYBODY ELSE IN SOCIETY, WE SIMPLY DO NOT EXIST.

I was born in a small village in Jessore, Bangladesh. My father was a simple farmer. We were poor, but all of my eight brothers and sisters went to school. I was known in my village as the girl with the golden voice. Growing up, my songs were about the earth, the sky, and my village. But when I met the man I wanted to marry, my songs changed to my love for him. He was twice my age. We would sit together for hours as he told me tales of his far-away travels to big cities. I was impressed by everything about him—his bicycle, his radio, his clothes. When I turned 13, he told me he wanted to marry me, and that he could make me into a famous singer one day. I agreed. It is very common for girls to marry early in rural India and Bangladesh. Since women are valued mostly as homemakers and mothers, families have no incentive to keep their daughters in school. The older a girl gets, the more her family will have to pay for her

dowry. For these reasons, many of my friends were already married when the question was posed to me.

My heart beat fast as we crossed the border in the darkness of night. I had never been to a big city like Kolkata, and so I was distracted from the reality that I was leaving my family and my school. I was terrified of being caught, but thrilled at the prospect of settling down with the man I loved.

When we arrived, he told me he wanted to keep me safe with his aunt until my parents stopped looking for us. In a few days, he would return for me. I was reluctant to see him go, but I trusted his decision. That night, in the glow of moonlight, I saw girls in short skirts and red lipstick standing in a line on the street. When a man approached one of them, she led him into her house. The next morning, I asked his aunt about these girls. She spoke to me in a hollow voice devoid of emotion. I was told that I had been sold to her by the man I loved, and that I would have to work off my debt by joining those girls each night.

To ‘break me in,’ I was raped several times a night for nearly a month before the madam started selling me to men for money. It was typical for me to have ten to twelve buyers every night.

I still remember that moment when my whole world shattered into pieces. I’ve been tortured and abused, and survived serious injuries inflicted by buyers and pimps, but nothing hurts as much as the pain of being deceived by the man I loved.

For a whole month, I resisted the ‘aunt,’ who I learned was really a brothel madam. The owner of the brothel grew impatient and raped me, as he did to all new girls. He ordered the brothel madam to beat me with a leather belt every day. I still bear these marks on my body. I was kept locked inside a room, with no food or water, for days.



TO “BREAK ME IN,” I WAS RAPED SEVERAL TIMES A NIGHT FOR NEARLY A MONTH BEFORE THE MADAM STARTED SELLING ME TO MEN FOR MONEY. IT WAS TYPICAL FOR ME TO HAVE TEN TO TWELVE BUYERS EVERY NIGHT. THEY WERE USUALLY ABUSIVE, TREATING ME AS IF THEY OWNED MY BODY. I HAVE A DEEP SCAR ON MY NECK FROM A KNIFE BLADE, WHICH I GOT TRYING TO SAVE A YOUNG GIRL IN MY HOUSE FROM BEING GANG RAPED. IT ALMOST KILLED ME.

Later I would learn that my story was not unique. There were hundreds of us—young girls from Bangladesh, Nepal and other parts of India, sold into brothels. To keep us isolated the brothel owners forbid us to speak

to girls in other houses. They were very afraid that we would form groups or befriend one another.

I tried to leave that dungeon many times. Memories still flash in my mind of my hair being pulled, of being dragged through the dirt streets by the brothel owner after a failed escape. Even though I cried, screamed for someone to help me, people just stood by watching, without even a look of sympathy. Tears stream down my face as I think back to that day. If even one man had tried to save me, my life would have been changed. But all of them stood there like mute spectators.

**i** Read more about trafficking and prostitution in India on page 12.

When people tell me that women choose this life, I can't help but laugh. Do they know how many women like me have tried to escape, but have been beaten black and blue when they are caught? To the men who buy us, we are like meat. To everybody else in society, we simply do not exist.

I had three children in my captivity—two beautiful daughters and a son. My children were my treasure, yet



Women and children at an Apne Aap community center. Photo courtesy of Apne Aap.



my love for them was often accompanied by fear of what would become of them in the red light area. As my children grew, it became hard for me to provide for them. My daughters had to drop out of school for financial reasons, while my son, who suffers from autism, needed my constant attention. The local pimps began to hint that I could make some money if I prostituted my two daughters. However, the pimps never touched them. All of the women in the brothel banded together to keep our children out of prostitution.

One day, I heard about an organization called **Apne Aap**, which helped women in my area leave prostitution. In 2010, I joined a self-empowerment group, where I quickly found a community of nine other women with similar stories. As I conversed with women who had made new lives for themselves, I felt hopeful for the first



Read about Ayesha's group and their entrepreneurial endeavors on page 13.

time that I could leave prostitution. It took me some time, but I permanently exited prostitution last year.

I asked Apne Aap staff to help my daughters find dignified livelihoods, so they wouldn't be prostituted. Apne Aap worked hard to find my eldest daughter a job. They set up interviews for her, offered her professional training and helped her eventually connect with a woman entrepreneur who owned the first all-women run petrol pump in Kolkata.

Today, my daughter's salary as a station supervisor provides for all of us. Although I am happy to no longer be in prostitution, with so many years taken from me, I have little options for an alternative way to support my family. I know this will not be my daughter's fate. She is making a life for herself outside of the red light area. Because of her, **I sing again.**



## Violence against Women and Sex Trafficking in India

India is reported to be the one of the<sup>1</sup> most dangerous<sup>2</sup> places for women<sup>3</sup> in the world, based on the high number of female feticide and infanticide, sexual violence, child marriage and trafficking of women and girls including for sexual exploitation.

A study sponsored by the Ministry of Women and Child Development estimated that about 3 million people are engaged in prostitution in India.<sup>4</sup> The same study estimated that over one third of the women and girls in prostitution enter before the age of 18, and in some parts of India, up to 72 percent of girls in prostitution entered before the age of 18.<sup>5</sup> NGOs have estimated that up to 50,000 women and children are trafficked annually from neighboring countries into the commercial sex industry.<sup>6</sup> The UN Office of Drugs and Crime has reported that the vast majority of trafficking victims are women and girls.<sup>7</sup>

1 Anderson, Lisa. "TRUSTLAW POLL – Afghanistan is most dangerous country for women." *Trust.org*. 15 June 2011. Web.

<http://www.trust.org/item/20110615000000-na1y8/?source=spotlight>

2 Pidd, Helen. "Why is India so bad for women?" *The Guardian*. 23 July 2012. Web.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/23/why-india-bad-for-women>

3 "India: Hanged woman rape claims in Uttar Pradesh." *BBC News India*. 11 June 2014.

Web. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-27790901>

4 Gram Niyojan Kendra, Girls/Women in Prostitution in India: A National Study, sponsored by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Nov. 2004, p. 77, available at [http://wcd.nic.in/research/prostitution\\_national\\_study.doc](http://wcd.nic.in/research/prostitution_national_study.doc)

5 *Id.*

6 Planning Commission, Government of India, *Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017)*, Vol. III, p. 176 ¶ 23.67, available at [http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/12thplan/pdf/12fyp\\_vol3.pdf](http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/12thplan/pdf/12fyp_vol3.pdf).

7 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, p. 39 (2012), available at [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Trafficking\\_in\\_Persons\\_2012\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Trafficking_in_Persons_2012_web.pdf).

## About Apne Aap



Apne Aap was founded in 2002 by 22 women from Mumbai's red light district who envisioned a world where no woman could be bought or sold. Through their community centers and self-empowerment groups across the country, women and girls can safely gather, access education, improve their livelihood options and receive legal rights training. Apne Aap helps marginalized women and girls work collectively to lift themselves out of the sex industry and to advocate for policy change to stem the demand for purchased sex.



Ayesha's Sonar Bangla group at work. Photo courtesy of Apne Aap.

i

### Ayesha, empowered business entrepreneur

After discovering a shared love of cooking and with the help of Apne Aap, Ayesha and nine other sex-trafficking survivors formed a self-empowerment group called Sonar Bangla ("Prosperous Bengal"). Seeking to support themselves outside of prostitution, the group members decided to turn their culinary passions into a thriving business.

They resolved to start a canteen to sell food to business people working in nearby offices. Ayesha, the group's leader, believes that the canteen is not just a good use of the women's skills, but is also a good business strategy. "There is no good canteen in or around the area where many people come to work in the offices. If [workers] get a clean and tasty lunch, they will definitely come back to our canteen again and again," she stated.

Sonar Bangla is just one example of the ways in which women organizing with the support of Apne Aap are being empowered to break out of the cycle of exploitation. Apne Aap has now organized over 10,000 women and girls at the risk of or in prostitution into self-empowerment groups, assisting them to access four fundamental rights: education, sustainable livelihood, legal empowerment and safe housing.



Photo: Suzanna Finley

# ruth/janelle/ lowyal/veronica

UNITED STATES

PARTNER: **GATEWAYS/JCCA**

# ruth/janelle/lowyal/veronica

UNITED STATES

In March 2013, Equality Now came together with The Arts Effect NYC, the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition and the inspiring team at Gateways, a Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) residential treatment facility for commercially sexually exploited youth, to develop and implement Project IMPACT, an 8-week leadership-through-storytelling workshop for teen trafficking survivors.

Building upon the tremendous treatment foundation and therapeutic arts programming offered by the dedicated staff at **Gateways/JCCA**, the goal was to offer a safe space and an additional creative mechanism for the girls of Gateways to come together as a community, openly discuss their rights and the current state of anti-trafficking legislation, and most importantly, discover the power and freedom that comes with telling their stories.

Meeting Ruth, Janelle, Lowyal and Veronica of Gateways was in many ways like meeting any group of teen girls we've worked with over the years across the globe. They're *girls*—girls you'd maybe see on the subway, waiting in line for a movie, or sitting in your classroom—young, ever-observant, headphones in, quick with a half-smile or an eye-roll. Girls who listen to Alicia Keys, gush about their nieces and nephews, and dream of going to college or opening beauty salons. Girls, who like most teenage girls, are skeptical when you inquire about their lives, feelings, ideas, and opinions.

What sets these bright, impassioned girls apart is that, like countless other children in New York State, they have experienced horrors in their young lives

that most of us don't see in our worst nightmares. They are girls who deserve to be heard—bold survivors with the knowledge and power to be change agents.

“WHY ARE YOU REALLY HERE?”  
“WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN US?”  
“YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO HEAR ABOUT US?” “YOU WANT US TO TELL OUR STORIES?” “BUT...WHY?”

 Read more about Gateways on page 18.



Read more about Project IMPACT

## Project IMPACT

Project IMPACT is an 8-week leadership-through-storytelling workshop for teen survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. The goal of Project IMPACT is to introduce survivors to the idea that sharing their stories is a powerful advocacy tool that can impact the legislative process, and can work to combat sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Project IMPACT also strives to help survivors understand that survivor storytelling is a choice—the survivor gets to select if, when and how she wants to share her story.

The program culminated in a trip to Albany where the survivors lobbied legislatures for the **Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act**.<sup>1</sup> This program has been funded by the New York Women's Foundation and was done in partnership with The Arts Effect NYC, JCCA and the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition.

<sup>1</sup> The Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act. *NY State Anti-Trafficking Coalition*. Web. <http://www.tvpja.com/>

“I THINK TELLING MY STORY MATTERS BECAUSE IT COULD HELP OTHER GIRLS LIKE ME.” “I GUESS STORYTELLING IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE I LIVED THIS—I’M THE ONE WHO KNOWS WHAT IT’S REALLY LIKE.” “BECAUSE EVERY PERSON AND EVERY STORY IS DIFFERENT AND I THINK THEY ALL DESERVE TO BE LISTENED TO.”

Through poetry, music-writing, monologue creation, and visual arts, the girls revealed their truths—the painful reality of family strife, substance abuse, betrayal by the criminal justice system, brutal violence suffered at the hands of pimps and buyers, AND ALSO the details of their courageous efforts to fight back, break free, and strive for a vibrant future.

—Katie Cappiello & Meg McNerney,  
The Arts Effect NYC

\* \* \* \* \*



Read song lyrics by Janelle, another participant in Project IMPACT on page 19.

**Ruth** was 12 years old when her mother’s boyfriend raped her. She ran away and was picked up by a pimp who forced her to have sex for money. Today, she’s a brilliant poet and spoken word artist who dreams of one day becoming an architect and building schools for children in Africa. Here is a poem written by Ruth, detailing her painful past and her powerful ability to overcome adversity.

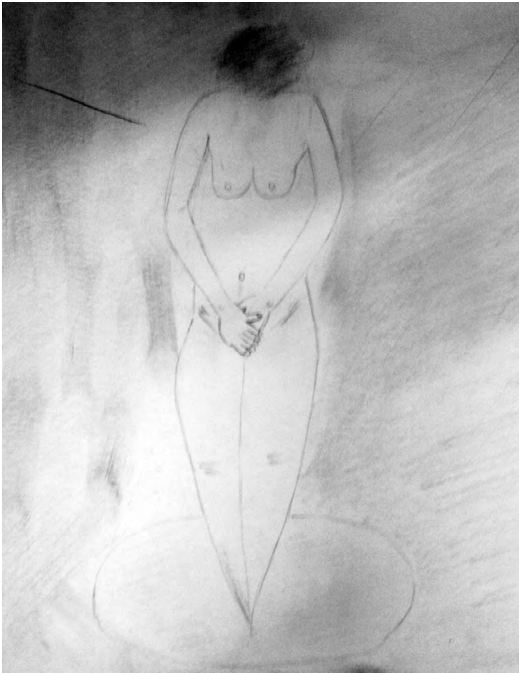
## FINISH LINE

You see me; I can’t let this go on any further...  
 So I’m going to let the finish where it starts.  
 I’m going to help shed light on the places that are so-called too dark.  
 Oh yeah; I’ve been through some of it all:  
 The gang banging, the street walking & having sex in the park.  
 See, none of this would have happened if I had help from the start.  
 See, for me, it started in this place that sometimes felt like hell,  
 But I still had to call it home.  
 It even included a mother, a sister, even a niece that is only a few years old.  
 But even when they were home, I still felt all alone.  
 By alone, see, I was all alone when that light skinned 6 foot tall grown man raped me.  
 See, no one was in this place I was to call home where I had a bed;  
 I cried inside because I was fighting a light skinned 6 foot battle all alone,  
 But I soon went to war when I ran away from this place  
 With the unbelievable name of home.  
 At night I was never alone, walking down pimp city road.  
 I was only 12 years old.  
 Walking up and down what we call the stroll.  
 See, to him it did not matter if I was cold or if I was hungry,  
 All he cared about was me bringing in that money.  
 Let me let you in on something I find real funny:  
 That sex trafficking is a nonviolent felony.  
 But in this life, violence became my “frienamie.”  
 Now I’m going to shed my light on this place that is so-called too dark,  
 See, I was hit and beat for things that weren’t my fault  
 And when I would say something smart,  
 I was raped and called dumb.  
 I never thought this day would come.  
 See I’m not just saying this, this is coming from the heart.  
 Yes, maybe I want to get a new start.  
 But I want my voice to help others whose world has fallen apart.  
 My best friend is a victim even though she is now 17.  
 She is a victim of our pimp, she is a victim of the streets.  
 She wants to be free, but she can’t do it all alone, she needs me.  
 And I need a team to help me finish where it starts.  
 If only you can feel the pain in our hearts.  
 To feel 2 inches tall when 5’1” is where you started.  
 Me and a little girl parted when all this trauma started.  
 See our lives are getting tough and we really don’t have time to toughen up.  
 And now look, I’ve reached the finish line, my time is up.  
 But that doesn’t mean that I give up.

\* \* \* \* \*



**Lowyal** was 13 years old when kids started bullying her every day at school. After tensions grew with her mother—“I thought I was grown...I wanted more than she could give me.”—she dropped out of school and stopped coming home at night. She started spending time with people who were a bad influence on her—she became involved in drugs and gang violence. Eventually, her “friends” introduced her to “the game” and started walking the stroll under the constant threat of pimps and johns. These drawings represent how Lowyal saw the world at that time: “In my eyes, everything was ruined and just burning.” Today, Lowyal is back at school—a self-proclaimed “nerd.” She wants to be a nurse or a doctor. She says, “Now I put my family first.”



**“After a night on the strip” by Lowyal**



**How I used to see things by Lowyal**



**Girl alone—her body on fire by Lowyal**

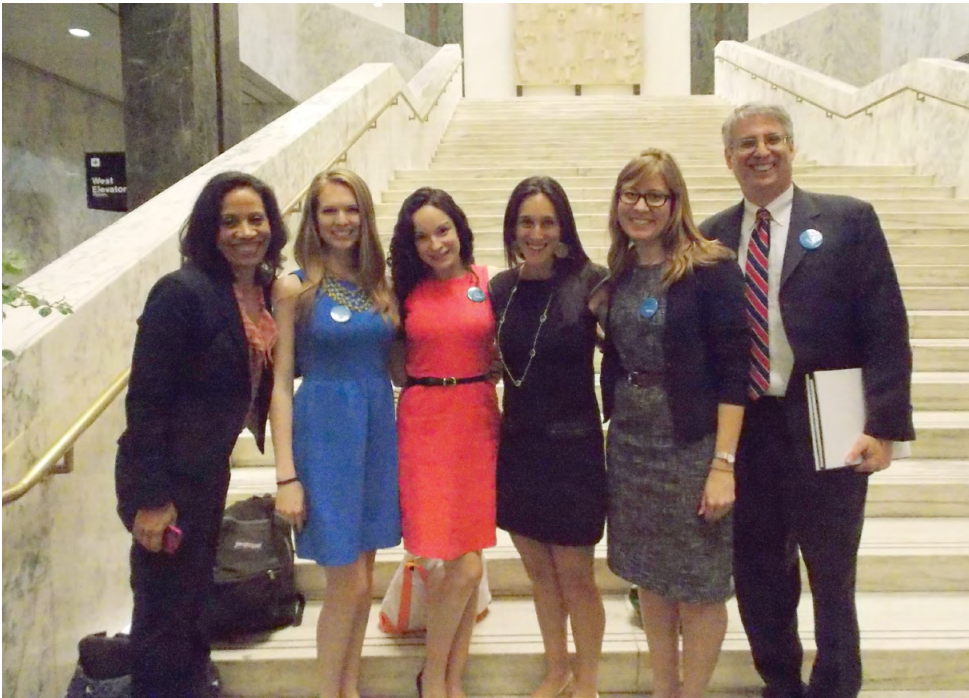
Over the past three months, as they pieced their personal Project IMPACT survivor stories together, the support, strength, and confidence they’ve gained in their time at Gateways is alive in every word and sketch. The girls realize they are the teachers; they are the experts—that we all need to LISTEN and LEARN from them. On May 21, the Project IMPACT team had the distinct honor of accompanying the girls of Gateways to Albany to lobby for the Trafficking Victims Protection and Justice Act (TVPJA). Listening to them speak, watching these brave teens command a room of lawmakers, it was clear they refuse to let their experiences in the life define them—instead, they’re choosing to own their experiences and serve as game-changing advocates. It is their powerful voices that will lead the charge toward a safer, more just world.



## About Gateways

The Gateways Program is a Jewish Child Care Association (JCCA) intensive, specialized Residential Treatment program for girls, ages 12-16, who have experienced Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and domestic trafficking. A team of highly trained professionals helps them recognize their trauma, heal, rebuild their self-esteem and reconnect to healthy positive peer

and adult role models. The program works closely with the young women and their families to develop treatment plans that moved the young women from feeling like “victims” to viewing themselves as “survivors.” Upon completion of the Gateways program, each girl participates in a validation ceremony to acknowledge her work, celebrate her value, and launch her into the next phase of a positive, healthy life. Learn more at [www.jccany.org](http://www.jccany.org).



*Members of the NYS Anti-Trafficking Coalition, Equality Now and The Arts Effect at TVPJA Lobby Day.*

## Trafficking in the United States

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimates that over 100,000 U.S. children and youth are victims of sex trafficking<sup>1</sup>.

### IN NEW YORK STATE,

- A 2007 Office of Child and Family Services study found 2,253 children are trafficked annually in New York City, and an additional 399 children are trafficked in upstate counties. However, this report noted it was likely undercounting due to the fact that many children are exploited behind closed doors.
- New York's 2008 Safe Harbor for Exploited Children Act defines a "sexually exploited child" as someone under 18 who is subject to sexual exploitation because s/he engages in sexual conduct in exchange for something of value. Under U.S. federal law, as well as international law (UN Palermo Protocol), anyone engaged in prostitution under the age of 18 is considered a victim of sex trafficking.

<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Ernie Allen, President and CEO of the National Center for Missing and Exploited children, at the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, September 15, 2010.

**Janelle**, who received assistance from Gateways, is an incredibly talented and passionate singer/song-writer. She looks forward to a career in the music industry! Below are song lyrics she wrote during Project IMPACT.

### KISS AND TELL

Red lipstick on my lips,  
How 'bout you give me just one sweet kiss  
But it's probably bitter.

Abandoned by beauty, abandoned by love.  
Trust was the only questions existing and it wasn't enough.  
Money, guns, sex and drugs were my only friends at the time...  
Behind closed doors he would pull out that knife,  
Press it up again my chest.  
Confusion in his eyes.  
Back to picture perfect again.  
Back to telling all the lies.  
Foreplay was the best play ever –  
Now I get the chance to tell –  
This is even better.

Kiss and tell.  
Former boyfriend kiss me so I can tell.  
Remember how you used to abuse.  
Yeah you used to hit me, then kiss me, and tell me you're sorry.  
This is payback from a woman whose been torn into pieces.  
I think you need to hear this.  
Kiss and tell.

It feels so good when I'm lusting for anticipation.  
Imaginary engagement ring worn upon my finger.  
Memories of an imperfect angel.  
Speaking of the devil.  
God it's about time – sometimes I wonder why you take so long.  
Peace and blessings are superior.  
My will is left alone.  
Expectations of them other guys.  
They never understood me...  
Ever since daddy left.  
Speed racing, hearts changing.  
Pick a game – you name it.  
Goodbye Vegas.

All my energy was taken from a toy soldier.  
Now I'm stronger, I'm wiser.  
I stand a bit taller.  
Cuz I'm a fighter.  
I just won the battle.  
This war is over.





Photo: Suzanna Finley

# loreta

LITHUANIA

PARTNER: **KLAIPEDA SOCIAL &  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
SERVICES CENTER**

# loreta

## LITHUANIA

*Loreta was prostituted from age 15 to age 19. After escaping her abusers, she lived at the Klaipeda Social and Psychological Services Center in Lithuania for a year, where she was provided with holistic survivor-oriented services to help her regain control of her life. Here is her story.*

I was born near the Lithuania–Latvia border. Since my alcoholic parents were incapable of caring for me, social workers sent me to a state-run children’s home. My seven brothers and six sisters were also sent to group homes, scattered across the country.

Growing up in a children’s home was really tough. We often tried to run away. The wardens treated us badly and beat us heavily for any perceived misdeed. Unhappy and depressed, I started smoking opium when I was 13 years old. We couldn’t wait until we turned 15 and could legally leave the home. At that time, the Soviet Union assigned newly emancipated children a foster parent until they turned 18 years old.

THAT’S WHEN DANA EXPLAINED SHE’D INVITED US OVER TO SELL OUR BODIES. SHE TOLD US THAT WE WOULD BE PROSTITUTES FROM NOW ON. MY FRIENDS AND I WERE SHOCKED AND REFUSED, BUT MY SISTER’S FRIEND THREATENED TO CALL ‘THE GANG’ IF WE CONTINUED TO REFUSE...

The only person who ever visited me was a man who claimed to be my godfather. He already had two foster children and told me I could live with him when I turned 15. All my friends thought I was very lucky and special. One day, however, when I was 13, he raped me. I didn’t tell anyone because I didn’t think anyone would believe me. Everyone at the home said, “You are lucky you have someone who will take care of you when you leave.”

They didn’t understand why I kept saying that I never, ever wanted to live with the man.

When my 15th birthday finally arrived, I was very relieved because I thought nobody would ever again have the right to hurt me, boss me around, or punish me. I left the home without any idea that this was only the beginning of a very difficult road.

I was sent against my will to live with my godfather and began to consume more opium. Shortly after my 16th birthday, a 21-year-old woman named Dana introduced herself to me as my sister. She treated me more like an acquaintance than a sibling, but I figured it was because we’d spent so much time apart. I hoped we would grow closer. Whenever I visited her apartment, there were many young women there who drank a lot and talked about going “to the bar to hook up with some studs.” I thought their language was interesting but didn’t understand what they meant. A couple of months later, my sister asked me if I had any girlfriends my age and I said I did. She didn’t mention my girlfriends again for a long time.

One day, Dana asked if she could drop by my place to see how I lived. She came with her friend and inspected how my four friends and I lived. We had no idea that they had visited us to secretly decide if we were fit for prostitution. We had never heard of “human trafficking” because everyone in the Soviet Union was fed propaganda that claimed that “life is beautiful.”

The next night Dana invited me and my two friends over to her apartment—even specifying the name of the friends I should bring—and promised to pay for our taxi. When we got there, we saw three more girls our age and seven Greek men speaking in English, drinking alcohol, talking and laughing. My sister and her friend told us to chat with them, but I told them that we didn’t feel comfortable meeting the men whom we didn’t understand. Dana grew angry and demanded we talk to them. She said we owed her friend money for the taxi ride that she had promised to pay for. She asked me if I really



didn't understand where I was and what we were expected to do. I had no idea. That's when Dana explained she'd invited us over to sell our bodies. She told us that we would be prostitutes from now on. My friends and I were shocked and refused, but my sister's friend threatened to call "the gang" if we continued to refuse to pay for the taxi and sell ourselves. She told us that the gang would beat us, rape us, and bury us alive in the woods. My friends and I started crying. I told Dana that I didn't understand how she could do this to her sister. From that day on, Dana was no longer my sister but my madam.

WHEN I TURNED 17, THE MADAM TOLD US THAT A PIMP WAS SELLING US ABROAD. ONE GIRL WAS SOLD IN POLAND, TWO IN BUDAPEST, AND THE REST OF US WERE TAKEN TO RAVENNA, ITALY.

That night after I sold my body, I felt repulsed. I wouldn't get out of the shower until I washed everything away. I felt so humiliated. I heard my friends crying too.

I was in prostitution from age 15 to 19. My friends and I lived in one apartment with the madam. When we had clients, taxi drivers would call and she would tell us to get ready. The clients waited in bars, nightclubs or hotels. Sometimes, we brought them to our apartment. We worked from 4pm till late night or early morning with three to four clients a day. Sometimes we used condoms, but sometimes we didn't. Most of the clients were foreigners who didn't speak my language and didn't care about my age. I didn't know how to contact the police and I didn't know if the police would even care. I wanted to run away, but was scared the gang would find me and kill me. My self-loathing grew, so I began injecting myself with drugs. I tried to numb myself from the pain so I wouldn't feel anything at all.

When I turned 17, the madam told us that a pimp was selling us abroad. One girl was sold in Poland, two in Budapest, and the rest of us were taken to Ravenna, Italy. When we arrived, we were sold to men whose language we didn't understand. They took us to a brothel

 Read more about sex trafficking in Lithuania on page 23.

filled with women aged 14-32, trafficked from Belorussia, Poland, and Lithuania. We had to take care of our clients in the public restrooms within 15 minutes. Pimps prevented us from escaping and used violence to force us to work in the streets.

After two weeks in Italy, I had an older client who understood Lithuanian. I took a risk and begged for his help. His friend took my friends and me to the Italian police. I was so surprised by how well the police treated us. They helped us get documentation so we could return to Lithuania and helped us change our names and appearances so the pimps couldn't find us. We were sent to an Italian organization that worked with victims of human trafficking and were granted refugee status. We spent around four months in protective custody until our identification documents were sorted out and then were brought to Vilnius, Lithuania where social workers took care of us. We lived there for about a year. A social worker worked with me a lot and helped me realize how I had been exploited.

As I struggled to rebuild my life, I realized that I didn't have any chance of supporting myself with only a ninth grade education, so I started making and selling drugs. Then, I met the man who would father my first child. After I got pregnant, I stopped the drugs. I tried to take care of my child and was moved from place to place. Over the years, I had three other children with different men. I really love my children and I live only for them,

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### POEM BY LORETA

*A person can make you feel low; a person can make you feel high.  
But only you can decide which way you want to go.  
A person can hurt you mentally.  
A person can hurt you physically, but only you can place a limit on your abilities.  
A person can cause a situation, but only you can create your own reputation.  
A person can make you laugh,  
A person can make you cry,  
But only you can make decisions for your life.  
I guess what I am trying to say that when you are living today,  
Do not live by what people do,  
But live by what you know is true.*

but I do not love their fathers. I realize that I cannot keep a long-term relationship with any man, probably because I hate how men have treated me.

When people ask me what I think about prostitution, I tell them that I sympathize with women who are trying to provide for their children and have no other option. I knew a woman whose pimp controlled her access to her children. She was scared to death and had no choice

but to stay with her pimp. Many girls stay in prostitution just so they can buy drugs, but the majority of them only became drug addicts to escape their terrible lives. I think the pimps should be gunned down, so that none of them are left on this earth. Maybe that would put an end to human trafficking and prostitution. As for myself, I hope to help children who are vulnerable, children who might fall prey to pimps. I live for these children and for my own four children.

## About Klaipeda SPSC

The **Klaipeda Social and Psychological Services Center** (Klaipeda SPSC)<sup>1</sup> is a non-profit organization which provides social and psychological support to youth, women with children, and families in the community. A holistic approach is used to deliver effective and quality services to survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking and/or prostitution. Klaipeda SPSC provides survivor-oriented services that include complex psycho-social assistance, safe accommodation, assistance in obtaining legal and medical services and assistance in re-entering the labor market.

The aim of these services is to empower trafficked and commercially sexually exploited women to take control of their lives and achieve their goals, thereby working towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. The center has been running a girls' skills group with girls from a foster care home as a tool for preventing various forms of violence. In collaboration with the media, Klaipeda SPSC raises awareness among the public about the effects of human trafficking, especially trafficking for the purpose of prostitution.

<sup>1</sup> Klaipeda SPSC. Web. <http://www.moteriai.lt/en>



**KLAIPEDA SOCIAL AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
SERVICES CENTER**



*Awareness raising seminar with police trainees.  
Photo courtesy of Kleipeda SPSC.*

### i

## Sex Trafficking in Lithuania

Lithuania, a Baltic country bordering northern and eastern European countries, is a point of entrance, transit, and departure for women and children trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. NGOs in Lithuania estimate that 40% of identified Lithuanian trafficking victims are women and girls subjected to sex trafficking within the country. Lithuanian women are also victims of sex trafficking in Western and Southern European countries. Victims include Lithuanian women and girls from orphanages and state-run foster homes, as well as women with mental or psychological disabilities<sup>1</sup>. In 2005, shortly after Lithuania joined the European Union (EU) and travel to other EU countries became easier, there was a documented spike in trafficking cases. An estimated 2,000 Lithuanian women and girls<sup>2</sup>—some as young as 14—were being taken abroad illegally each year for the sex trade.

<sup>1</sup> US Department of State, 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report, Lithuania

<sup>2</sup> Sheeter, Laura. "Lithuania's sex traffic on the rise." *BBC News*. 26 October 2005. Web. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4378834.stm>



Photo: ChildVoice International

# concy

UGANDA

PARTNER: **CHILDVOICE  
INTERNATIONAL**

*When people think of sex trafficking, they often think of commercial sexual exploitation—where traffickers and pimps profit monetarily from the exploitation of human beings. However, under the Palermo Protocol<sup>1</sup>, the internationally agreed upon definition of trafficking in persons doesn't necessarily require an exchange of money to have taken place.*

*In war-torn Uganda, the abduction of boys to become child soldiers has been widely reported on. However, the fate of thousands of Ugandan girls, who were abducted and sexually exploited, forced to become sex slaves for rebels and soldiers during Uganda's civil war, has received less attention. They, too, are victims of trafficking and their voices must also be heard.*

As a young child, my life was good and I felt happy. I spent many evenings playing netball and dancing with my friends. My family's home was located in Unyama, a village outside of Gulu, in northern Uganda. I am the youngest of four children, two boys and two girls. As a child, I helped fetch water and cook for my family, but I also attended primary school. My father was never home, so my mother and grandfather raised me. We were a happy family that loved each other.

**WHEN I WAS 10 YEARS OLD, I WAS MARRIED AGAINST MY WILL TO A BRIGADE COMMANDER. THE FIRST TIME HE FORCED ME TO HAVE SEX; I BLED AND CRIED A LOT.**

When I was nine years old, my life changed suddenly. On the night of May 22, 2000, rebels with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) descended on our home. My mother and I were asleep in our hut when they barged in and woke us up by kicking down the door. Five men

caught us right away. One man held me down, ripped off my blouse, and tied me up. I watched in horror as another man beat my mother badly. One of the rebels brought in a large bag of *posho*—maize meal—and ordered me to carry it. They tied up my grandfather and others in my village and forced all of us to walk and walk without rest to an unknown destination. After a few days, the rebels allowed my grandfather to leave, but he could not even look into my eyes to say goodbye. He walked away in silence. The rebels told me not to be afraid because they would take me back home, but I didn't believe them. I feared they were going to kill me.

The rebels didn't kill me, but they forced me to kill others. I was trained to fight and shoot a gun. At first I refused, but they beat me and threatened me with death. The rebels made examples out of some of the children to warn the rest of us what would happen if we disobeyed their orders. The boys were forced to rape, and the girls got raped. All the girls were divided among the male fighters as "wives." The leaders believed the male fighters would escape if they did not have "wives" to fulfill their sexual desires.

When I was 10 years old, I was married against my will to a Brigade Commander. The first time he forced me to have sex; I bled and cried a lot. I was in great pain, but my "husband" had a gun next to him and I had seen him use it before so I tried to stop crying. Every day he called me and demanded sex. Whenever I tried to resist, he beat me to the point of paralysis. Sometimes I felt so weak because we had no food or water, but I had to go to him anyway. The Brigade Commander had a total of 20 "wives"—some were very young, but most were between 12 and 18 years old. If the rebels raided a village and abducted a beautiful girl, she would be

1. "Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs." United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), Article 3(a).



forced to marry the Brigade Commander. Since I was also a soldier who fought, I was more respected than some of the other girls who were only “wives.” When my “husband” would go away, I would stay with his other “wives” and keep them in line. I knew that if any of them ever escaped, I would be killed.

## WHEN I RETURNED HOME... MY NEIGHBORS AND COMMUNITY WERE AFRAID OF ME AND SHUNNED ME; THEY KNEW I WAS FORCED TO COMMIT UNSPEAKABLE ACTS OF VIOLENCE.

A year into my captivity, a big fight erupted not far from where we were being held between LRA members and Ugandan government soldiers. I decided to use the opportunity to run away, as I would rather die trying to escape than die in the bush as a sex slave. Two other girls ran with me, and we made it to the barracks where the government soldiers were staying. When we arrived, the guards took our guns and gave us clothes and food. After a while, they took us back to our villages. When I returned home, my mother accepted me despite my past. However, my neighbors and community were afraid of me and shunned me; they knew I was forced to commit unspeakable acts of violence. Life was difficult even at home. I suffered from extreme insomnia, haunted by memories of the rebels. I was still breathing, but somehow I didn't really feel alive. My mind kept replaying the past. I tried to return to school when I was 12, but I couldn't concentrate on what my teachers were saying. I found other people who had suffered like me, but I still felt so alone.

One day when I was 15, I was walking home from school when a man around 19 years old approached me and forcibly took me into his hut deep in the bush. I tried to fight the man, but he was too strong. No one was around to help me or hear my screams. When I went home, my mom chased me away, telling me to go back to the man since he was my husband now. I didn't want

to go back to him; I wanted to go to school. However, I had nowhere else to go, so I returned to him and soon grew pregnant with my daughter. My family accepted me again since I was living with the man as his wife. I spent a year with my new “husband”, but he drank too much alcohol. We would fight and he would beat me badly for no reason. After one particularly vicious beating, I took my child and fled to my mother's home. I stayed at home for six months and then I heard about **ChildVoice International**.

Since then my life has changed. I am very different now. I went to ChildVoice not speaking a word of English. During my time there, I learned English and skills such as catering, baking, and tailoring. I also found solace in my growing relationship with God.

## I WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE IN NORTHERN UGANDA.

**i**  
Read more on  
sexual slavery  
in Northern  
Uganda on  
page 27.

After leaving ChildVoice, I found work in a bakery in Pece and met my current husband. Unlike my first husband, he is good to me and treats me as an equal. For the first time in my life, I have hope for the future and my children's future. Today, I believe I can do many good things if I find a way. I am much happier now and can even laugh sometimes. On most days, I can talk about the past without feeling fear and shame. My past no longer stops me from living my future.

I want people to know what has happened here in Northern Uganda. Even though the fighting has ceased, men continue to abuse women. Those who have escaped from the bush should be able to return to school and learn some skills so they can have a future. In my country, we do not provide enough support for child soldiers. Right now, there are only a few organizations to help us. Many of us survived the conflict, but we can do nothing but cry about our past since we have no family, food, money or skills. The government needs to provide more support for former child “wives” of the LRA rebels.

# About ChildVoice International



ChildVoice International is a non-profit organization seeking to restore the voices of children silenced by war by raising awareness, promoting research and facilitating effective, sustainable interventions. Working in partnership with local organizations and community leaders, the

organization works to ensure that programs meet the needs of affected populations with efficiency and effectiveness. The children served by ChildVoice International and partnering grassroots organizations include former child soldiers, children orphaned by war, and those left destitute by rebel activity. The organization operates a comprehensive program in Northern Uganda, including a rehabilitation center for formerly abducted girls and their children, a primary school and a health center. Learn more at [childvoiceintl.org](http://childvoiceintl.org).

## i

### Sexual Slavery in Northern Uganda

Northern Uganda has been devastated by the conflict between the Ugandan government and the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), one of the longest running conflicts in Africa. The LRA has used brutal tactics and targeted the civilian population as the conflict progressed, abducting approximately one in three male adolescents and one in five female adolescents in Uganda—a total of more than 60,000 Ugandan children. While the LRA is still active, it now mainly operates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, and its numbers have dwindled. Uganda is still struggling to fully disarm, reintegrate and rehabilitate the LRA's kidnapped child and youth recruits as well as provide resources and counseling for traumatized child “wives” of soldiers.

Female abductees were forced not only to fight but also to cook, carry supplies and act as servants to commanders of the LRA. Many young women were also forced to serve as “wives” to male soldiers, and were routinely subjected to rape, sexual slavery, unwanted pregnancy, indentured servitude and/or torture under the guise of “marriage.”

- An estimated 1 out of 5 girls<sup>1</sup> in Uganda have been abducted by the LRA.
- Nearly a half of LRA commanders had five or more forced “wives,” with lower level fighters averaging two forced “wives.”
- Unlike male child-soldiers, female child-soldiers often come back with children and thus are unable to continue their school and rarely catch up to non-abducted females.

<sup>1</sup> Note: source applies to entire section. Statistics from Annan et. al., “The state of female youth in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey of War-Affected Youth (SWAY).” *Relief Web*. 29 April 2008. Web. <http://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/state-female-youth-northern-uganda-findings-survey-war-affected-youth-sway>



Photo: Suzanna Finley

# grace

NIGERIA/GERMANY

PARTNER: **SOLWODI**

# grace

NIGERIA/GERMANY

*Grace was educated until the 10th grade in Nigeria after which she was sent to work to help support her family, who lived in poverty. She worked for three years at various jobs, during which time she was raped and gave birth to a son. Her father told her that as a woman, she was “predestined by God to save her family from poverty by going to Europe to earn money.” He introduced her to a woman whose sister lived in Germany. Grace was told that she would have to repay the travel costs by working for the woman’s sister, after which she could work as a babysitter or in a restaurant to send money back home. As she was unfamiliar with German currency, Grace didn’t have an understanding of the amount she would have to repay, but she decided to take the chance because she didn’t have better prospects for her life in her country and her family was pressuring her. As is typical in her community, she underwent a Juju (Voodoo) ritual where she swore never to betray the contact in Germany and that she would pay all the debts.*

A “trolley-man” accompanied me and a bunch of other women being taken to various countries in Europe to a hotel to organize our travel documents. I was given the passport of an African woman from a different country and then transported with another woman to Germany. Once I arrived, I was told that my debt was 50,000 euro (around 67,000 USD) which I realized would take a very long time to repay. My family’s contact then told me that to pay the debt, I would be working as a prostitute in brothels (which are legalized in Germany). It was then that I realized that my family’s contact was a madam. I refused and called my parents to explain what was happening, but they told me to obey her and do whatever she told me to do. I didn’t have any papers and didn’t know my rights. She said that if I asked anyone for help, I would be deported, so I didn’t think I had any choice but to become a prostitute. In Nigeria, we respect Germany. I didn’t even think that they did this as a job in Germany; in Italy and Spain, we know there is prostitution. My mother begged me to do

what they said. I cried every time a man slept with me, because I was brought up Christian. Back in Nigeria, the father of my son had raped me, and this reminded me of that over and over.

**I WORKED FOR SEVEN MONTHS AND WAS TOLD BY MY VARIOUS EMPLOYERS THAT I HAD TO HAVE SEX WITHOUT CONDOMS WHEN ASKED. MEN DEMANDED SEX WITHOUT CONDOMS.**

I worked day and night for months, doing everything they asked me, in order to get the money for my madam; and every day I cried. If I came home (I lived with my traffickers) without enough money, my madam would seriously reprimand and abuse me. And, after servicing clients, I would often have to wash dishes and take care of the children in the house. I worked for seven months and was told by my various employers that I had to have sex without condoms when asked. Men demanded sex without condoms. At a well-known legal brothel, the owners told me directly that I had to have sex without condoms, otherwise I would be fired. The owners would ask the clients afterwards if they were happy, if I willingly serviced them without a condom. My madam wanted me to do it without a condom. She said that I was no better than the other girls, and I should do what the brothels wanted to earn more and pay her back. I wouldn’t be able to pay off the debt if I couldn’t work, so I did it. The women here are so desperate for money that they don’t care about AIDS—people here are ready to die. This is blood money, and it was killing me, too.

Seven months after I started, police carried out a check on the brothel and they asked me if I was working there voluntarily. I was very scared and, remembering the oath I had sworn before leaving Nigeria, I said “yes.” They looked over my papers and, realizing they weren’t mine, arrested me and took me to the immigration detention centre. While there I became sick, vomiting,



and was brought to a hospital. I found out then that I had AIDS. My madam managed to track me down after I left the hospital and told me that I had to continue being a prostitute to pay for the remaining debt, which she said was still more than half of the 50,000 euro. I refused and she started threatening me and my family back home, who begged me to comply. By then, I had become acquainted with **SOLWODI**, and they helped me to get settled and exit prostitution. I refused to go back to my madam and eventually reported her and her accomplices to the police.

**NO ONE SHOULD BE FORCED;  
BUYERS, PIMPS AND TRAFFICKERS  
ARE KILLING HUMAN BEINGS AND  
SPREADING SICKNESS.**

I am very mixed up now. Sometimes I have high hopes for the future and other times I feel very beaten down. I do not want to go back to Nigeria and I know I would be at risk there. I have a partner now who accepts me for who I am and the support of SOLWODI, which makes me happy. However, I wish people would tell parents that it is good to educate girls and get them proper job training, rather than sending them into prostitution. A child is a gift of God, whether it is a man or a woman.

Women are not slaves and traffickers should stop taking other people's children. No one should be forced; buyers, pimps and traffickers are killing human beings and spreading sickness. They should prostitute themselves if they want money! Some people are paying 90,000-100,000 euro to buy people. Stopping the sex industry would be the best, it should not exist—that's blood money!

When I was in the sex industry, I prayed that someone would take me away. If men would be charged, given severe punishments, it would stop.

i

### **Sex Trafficking of Nigerian women and girls to Germany**

A significant number of non-European victims of sex trafficking identified in Germany come from Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. Like Grace, many Nigerian victims are coerced into and kept in prostitution through *juju* rituals, where they take an oath to do whatever is asked of them to pay off their debt to traffickers<sup>2</sup>.

- 1 United States Department of State, 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report.
- 2 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Measures to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in Benin, Nigeria and Togo, September 2006.

## About SOLWODI

**Solidarität mit Frauen in Not**



**SOL**idarity with **WO**men in **DI**stress (**SOLWODI**) assists women and girl victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, sexual violence, domestic violence and/or forced marriage, or who are in other situations of distress. SOLWODI has 15 counseling centers, one contact office and seven shelters throughout Germany, 10 counseling

centers along the Kenyan coast and is supporting a project in Rwanda assisting widows and orphans. In 2010, SOLWODI opened a counseling center in Bucharest, Romania, and in 2012, SOLWODI Austria was founded.

SOLWODI assists both foreign women and women from within the countries in which it works. Through its network of counseling centers and organizations in Germany and abroad, SOLWODI provides holistic psychosocial care and counseling, shelter, legal aid, medical assistance, integration services and residence permits, as well as support in returning foreign women and girls to their home countries. The organization also raises public awareness to foster understanding about the experiences of the women it is working with, and carries out advocacy and lobbying work aimed at changing policies on migration and violence against women issues, including advocating for the adoption of the Nordic Model in Germany.



Photo: Suzanna Finley

k.

GERMANY

PARTNER: **SOLWODI**

k.

GERMANY

*K.'s story as told to **SOLWODI** and the German courts:*

It all began in the early morning hours of 9 April 2011. My pimp had once again beaten and strangled me so badly that I was afraid I would die. I managed to escape through the brothel window and dialed the emergency number. At that time I had no idea what the consequences of that call would be.

HE TOLD ME THAT IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE OUR DREAM OF A FUTURE TOGETHER, WE WOULD NEED MONEY, AND THE QUICKEST WAY TO GET THIS MONEY WAS FOR ME TO—JUST TEMPORARILY, OF COURSE—WORK AS A PROSTITUTE.

I'd known my pimp since I was 11 years old. He was my 46-year-old riding instructor and he made me into his "mistress" when I was 14 years old. I dreamt of living together with this man who was 35 years older than me. He told me we would have our own horse ranch—a childhood dream of mine. He told me that in order to achieve our dream of a future together, we would need money, and the quickest way to get this money was for me to—just temporarily, of course—work as a prostitute. Over time, he managed to completely isolate me from my friends and family, and started "training" me to be a prostitute by showing me how to perform various sex acts and by taking me on visits to brothels. Soon my "loving and fatherly" riding teacher increasingly revealed himself to be a "Loverboy" (a man who pretends to be a woman or girl's boyfriend in order to lure her into prostitution). In 2000, when I was 17, I ran away from home with him and he put me in a brothel. His earlier promises of love and a future together were now followed by beatings, rapes and humiliation. There was no way back for me. He was the only person I had in this world and I didn't want to lose him. After all, I loved him.

\* \* \*

*When K.'s pimp took her for the first time to "work" in a brothel in Bremen, K. began crying and refused to cooperate, and he took her back to their hometown in Bavaria. However, after continued abuse paired with affection, he soon succeeded in prostituting K. in apartments and various legal brothels throughout Germany. During her time in prostitution, spanning over 10 years, K. rarely had days off, sometimes had 20-40 buyers a day, and lived inside the brothels and apartments. Her pimp took all of her money, and repeatedly raped and beat her inside the brothels. When K. was 20, her pimp pressured her to get breast implants.*

*Though K.'s pimp had previously been convicted of pimping in 1970 and had a long criminal record for other crimes including fraud and bodily harm, he was able to become the manager of a legal brothel in 2001, and to get K. "employed" in various legal brothels throughout the country—in at least two of these brothels while she was still a minor. He also signed a contract on her behalf making her a manager of one of the brothels, during which time K. continued to be prostituted in the very same brothel, with her pimp taking all of her earnings.*

\* \* \*

Back to what happened in 2011: As a result of my help-call, the police came to the brothel, followed by an ambulance which took me to the emergency room. The criminal investigation police were also informed. They interrogated me several times and examined my injuries. I was deliberately kept away from the brothel and my pimp so that I wouldn't back out of the investigation. At that time I didn't even realize what was going on; I was a complete wreck, physically and emotionally. The following weeks were hell for me and my relatives. I was interrogated by the criminal police for about 70 hours, with old wounds being reopened each time. Court proceedings followed. I impressed everyone with my personality, my intelligence and my good memory, so much so that the prosecution fully rested on my statements and credibility. During the trial, I was questioned for almost 20 hours over six days. The public was very interested in the case, and TV and radio

stations as well as newspapers were constantly reporting on it. I can't express in words how it felt to have to testify in court over and over again. I was sitting there in the large chamber and had to reveal the most intimate details of my life. I had to describe in precise detail all the rapes, beatings and acts of degradation I suffered. I became completely and utterly exhausted. I lost 17 kg (around 37 pounds) and repeatedly had to get medical treatment. If I hadn't had such a strong support system, I probably would not have survived that time period. But the result was really impressive! In December 2011 my pimp was sentenced to nine years in prison and just barely avoided getting locked up for the rest of his life. But what really caused a stir was that the court ruled that I should receive €1,000,000 (around \$1,350,000 USD) compensation for the earnings that my pimp took from me over the years.

**TODAY, WHEN I LOOK BACK ON WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE I MADE THAT EMERGENCY CALL, I HAVE TO ASK MYSELF: WHERE IS THE JUSTICE IN OUR LEGAL SYSTEM?**

Some people now believe I am a millionaire, but that's not the case. I will not see one cent of that million. After the verdict, everyone considered the case to be closed and for things to be over and done with. But for me it wasn't over, and it still isn't to this day. I fell into deep depression, sadness and loneliness. My family was continuously looking for therapy for me, but in vain. I have been involved in drawn-out disputes with the owner of the last brothel, the tax authority and even a former client. The owner of the brothel threatened to claim compensation from me because the brothel had been closed but my contract with the owner—signed on my behalf by my pimp—was valid until 2015. Although I was able to negotiate down the sum, which was originally much higher, I still had to pay €5,000 to the tax authority for the profits generated for the brothel by the other women during my absence, since I was legally the manager (according to the contract signed by my pimp on my behalf), even though it was proven in the criminal court case against my pimp that I had been trafficked and exploited in that same brothel during that time. I have also been the defendant in a civil case in which a client is demanding repayment of €50,000, even though it was proven during the criminal trial that this

attempt to buy me was against my will and that my pimp got the money. I find it unbelievable that, according to our laws, I am required to pay back that money just because it passed through my hands.

Today, when I look back on what has happened since I made that emergency call, I have to ask myself: where is the justice in our legal system? Without the unbelievable support of my family and of friends, I wouldn't have been able to get through all of this. If my family hadn't paid for everything, I would be financially ruined. What other victim has such a strong support system and such financial resources? My guess is none! Should our government order law enforcement to first check the financial capabilities of a victim before they offer help? Seems so! But that would mean that in the future only those victims would get help who can afford freedom—sad but true!

## i

### Sex Trafficking and prostitution in Germany

- In 2012, 88% of victims of sex trafficking identified in Germany came from Europe, including 22% from within Germany, like K<sup>1</sup>.
- SOLWODI has been coming across younger and younger victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. They have also noticed a worsening of the situation in terms of trafficking since prostitution was legalized in Germany in 2002. In their experience, legalization has not helped the situation of women in prostitution<sup>2</sup>, but has only benefited brothel owners, pimps, traffickers and buyers.
- One of the main intentions in relaxing Germany's laws on prostitution was for it to be treated more like a 'normal job', and to thereby increase access for people in prostitution to social and health benefits, and to reduce stigma against them. However, in 2013, Germany's national employment agency reported that only 44 of the estimated 200,000-400,000 people in prostitution throughout Germany are registered<sup>3</sup> as such.
- Police in different parts of Germany have been reporting widespread exploitation and organised crime in their legal prostitution sectors. For example, police in Augsburg, Bavaria estimate that only 10% of women in prostitution there are in it voluntarily<sup>4</sup> and without a pimp, with the remaining 90% of women in prostitution involuntarily.

1 United States Department of State, 2013 Trafficking in Persons Report.  
2 SOLWODI 2012 Annual Report (German). Web. [http://www.solwodi.de/fileadmin/\\_medias/pdf/Jahresberichte/Jahresbericht\\_2012.pdf](http://www.solwodi.de/fileadmin/_medias/pdf/Jahresberichte/Jahresbericht_2012.pdf)  
3 "Augsburg mit höchster Dichte von Prostituierten." *Die Welt*. 3 November 2013. Web. <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article121480296/Augsburg-mit-hoechster-Dichte-von-Prostituierten.html>  
4 Sporer, Helmut. "Prostitution in Germany." European Women's Lobby. Reality of Prostitution Seminar. Brussels. 1 October 2013. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/184667092/Prostitution-in-Germany-by-Detective-Superintendent-Helmut-Sporer>





Photo: Suzanna Finley

# natalie & sam

AUSTRALIA

PARTNER: **PROJECT RESPECT**

# natalie & sam

## AUSTRALIA

***Natalie was born in South East Asia, where she was sexually exploited in an illegal brothel.***

When I was 20 years old, and my daughter was a little over one, I moved to the city. That's when my life changed forever.

I looked for a job in my native country in Southeast Asia, but couldn't find anything. I ended up sleeping in a bus stop, waiting for people to help me, because I didn't know anyone. I met an old man who got me a job working for a Japanese company through one of his relatives. They helped me arrange accommodation at a hostel, and for a few months things went well.

## I HAD BEEN SOLD. I FELT LIKE MY LIFE WAS OVER.

One of the girls from the hostel introduced me to a man who was her friend. We used to all go out together. One night he took me out for dinner with one of his friends. We talked normally all through dinner—'how is life', that sort of thing. Then the man I came with got a phone call and had to leave. He never came back.

It got late. The other man said to me that he had a hotel, and I could stay there and wait. As we walked to the hotel, he was nice, but once we got there, everything changed. It was not a hotel, it was an illegal brothel. He introduced me to the girls, telling them to instruct me on what to do. I had been sold. I felt like my life was over.

I didn't know what was going on. I was hoping I would wake up and it would all be a dream. I had to sleep there and do whatever they said, but at least I could use condoms. I had to stay, and I had to work because he had bought me. I didn't get paid anything. After a few months, I managed to run away.

*After she ran away, Natalie moved to New South Wales, Australia, where prostitution is decriminalised.*

I finally decided to move overseas—to Australia, so that

I could one day return home with more options. I could study there and use the qualifications I earned back in my home country. I had so many dreams; I was happy. I went on my first ever plane trip!

However, Australia was worse than my home country. I was told when I got to Sydney that I had a debt of \$6000AUD plus commission per job, plus rent, plus transport, plus cleaning, and everything else they charged for. If you were five minutes late they charged you \$50. It all adds up. And this was in a 'legal' brothel.

I could not say no to clients—no way! I couldn't even stop and sit for a minute. I had to do it as many times in one hour as the client could do it. Three months felt like 30 years. We could sleep for maybe three hours a night, starting work at noon, finishing at 6am. Eventually, I managed to run away from there too.

I was in the sex industry for seven years, on and off. I wanted to leave for a long time. For three years I tried to get another job to support me and my daughter.

Finally, **Project Respect** came into my life. A friend told me about them and introduced me to one of their staff members. If they had not helped to get me a job, I would probably still be there. I am in my 30s now and I have fully left, but it's not easy. I don't understand why trafficking happens. If women could earn proper money, it wouldn't happen. Women go into the sex industry for the money, not because they like it.

## I WANT TO HELP PEOPLE THAT HAVE BEEN THROUGH THINGS LIKE ME. I WANT WOMEN TO KNOW THAT WE HAVE A CHANCE; WE HAVE A LIFE OUT THERE AND I WANT THEM TO KNOW THAT THEY HAVE OPTIONS.

Men should not be allowed to buy sex. Why do they want to buy sex? Men who buy sex are not good at all; maybe they are good in the outside world, but in 'our world'

they are nasty. They think that because they pay, you are like a slave. Trafficking is the worst part. We can't talk; we have to do what we are told. When I had my period I said that I couldn't work, but you have to. When a customer is rough, you still have to do what he says.

I want to help people that have been through things like me. I want women to know that we have a chance; we have a life out there and I want them to know that

they have options. How many people are out there who are not getting help? I want to write a book, so people can know the reality. Most people think that women go into the sex industry for sex. If men didn't pay, women wouldn't work there.

A long time ago, someone said to me that they didn't think trafficking is real. What do they mean? I am real. I am here.

\* \* \*



Read more on legal approaches to prostitution on page 37.

***Sam*** moved from her home country of New Zealand to Victoria, Australia, where she was sexually exploited in a legal brothel.

I was raped at the age of 12 by a family friend. I didn't tell anyone in my family until I was 27. I strongly believe that my early life experiences made the idea of going into prostitution later on an easier decision—if you can even call it that. My body had already been violated and men had used me for sex for years. Past experience of abuse often plays a major role in women ending up in the sex industry.

When entering the industry no one tells you about the possible impacts. It's easy to get caught up in the money to be made and not realise the impact it has both psychologically and physically. I find it difficult to believe that when it's looked at logically, some people don't get how damaging it is.

I moved from New Zealand to Australia in my 20s and entered prostitution in legal brothels in Victoria a few years later. I was very naïve in the beginning; I even used my real name for the first three weeks because no one told me that I shouldn't. I had very low esteem and body image issues so found it exhilarating that men chose me. I laugh about that thought now. I would never base my self-worth on whether or not a man wants to have sex with me now—or even finds me attractive for that matter.

BY LEGALISING PROSTITUTION MEN ARE BEING TOLD BY THE GOVERNMENT THAT IT'S PERFECTLY OK TO PURCHASE A WOMAN. WOMEN ARE NOT COMMODITIES TO BE BOUGHT AND SOLD. LEGALISATION NORMALISES SOMETHING THAT IS FAR FROM NORMAL.

I earned more money on my first shift than I did all week in my part time activity work role. An average shift would mean having sex with five to eight men. Some were short bookings (20 mins) others were long (1 hr). I think it was around the two year mark that I started to feel the strain both physically and emotionally.

If you do prostitution full-time you would generally have five long shifts and, on average, have sex with between 20 to 40 strangers; some of whom will treat you badly. How can anyone think that it is not going to do you harm?

I believe that the men who go to brothels see absolutely nothing wrong with it; they are fed sexualised images by the media everywhere, and why not! The government says that it's ok; the law says it's ok so why would they question it?

I do not see the industry as a viable option for women, but understand due to the economy, unequal pay, and gender inequality in general why some women end up there.

I thought about leaving for such a long time, but I was in my 40s by the time I did it. And this was only because I managed to find some time to study in the back of a brothel. A friend promised me a job as soon as I was qualified, so as soon as I got my degree, I left.

My experience of being in prostitution has impacted my life in many ways. I think that 99% of men are not nice human beings; they have no respect for women. I don't trust any men. I sometimes still have nightmares about a client who treated me badly.

I believe that Australia should adopt the Swedish Model in regards to prostitution. Demand should be criminalised. In focusing on the demand side, Sweden has been successful in reducing trafficking. Women are in a position in society where circumstances push them into prostitution, but men have a choice. They don't need to have sex available to them. By legalising prostitution men are being told by the government that it's perfectly ok to purchase a woman. Women are not commodities to be bought and sold. Legalisation normalises something that is far from normal.

## i

### Legal Approaches to Prostitution

Different states in Australia have different laws on prostitution. Some, like the state of Victoria—where Sam experienced sexual exploitation—have a legalized system, while others, like New South Wales—where Natalie was trafficked—have decriminalized prostitution.

No country, state or city has a system that falls completely and neatly into one category. However, having a *legalized* system generally means that buying and selling sex, as well as organizing and managing prostitution (e.g. brothel-keeping and sometimes procuring, i.e. pimping) are all legal, but there are laws and regulations specific to the prostitution industry. For example, there may be mandatory health checks or registration for people in prostitution, or 'zoning', where street prostitution is allowed in specific areas only. Because of the degree of government oversight and intervention, legalization is sometimes also referred to as regulation. Countries that fall broadly into this category include Germany and the Netherlands.

In *decriminalized* systems, all of the above are usually also legal, but the difference is that most laws and regulations specific to prostitution have been repealed, and prostitution is expected to be dealt with as any other business under general labor, health and safety laws and regulations. New South Wales in Australia is usually put into this category, as is New Zealand.

Ultimately, both legalization and decriminalization allow for most activities around prostitution to be legally carried out. Both systems can be contrasted with *full criminalization* and the *Nordic Model*. In full criminalization countries, both buying and selling sex are illegal, as are activities around prostitution such as brothel-keeping and pimping. In Nordic model<sup>1</sup> countries, buyers, pimps and traffickers are criminalized, while people in prostitution are not and are instead provided with exit strategies and support services, not criminal records.

1 "What is the 'Nordic Model'?" *Equality Now*. Web.  
[http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Nordic\\_Model\\_EN.pdf](http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Nordic_Model_EN.pdf)

## About Project Respect



**Project Respect** is an Australian non-profit, feminist, community-based organization that works to empower and support women in the sex industry, including women trafficked to Australia. It is made up of a diverse team who believe that all women matter, and includes women who have been, or still are involved in the sex industry, in positions throughout the organization.

Beginning in 1998, Project Respect has offered specialist, non-judgmental outreach and individual support to women in the sex industry across the state of Victoria. Project Respect provides women with intensive case management, emergency accommodation, and support for education and alternative employment opportunities. In addition to providing direct services, Project Respect engages in advocacy and public education efforts, and collaborates closely with partners in countries where many women are trafficked to Australia from, particularly in the Asia Pacific region. It offers training to health care workers, women's groups, law enforcement and others who may come into contact with women in the sex industry and trafficking victims.

For additional information on trafficking in Australia, visit [projectrespect.org.au/resources/video](http://projectrespect.org.au/resources/video).





Photo: Suzanna Finley

# lilly & michelle

NEW ZEALAND

PARTNER: **FREEDOM FROM SEXUAL  
EXPLOITATION**

&

**STOP DEMAND**

# lilly & michelle

NEW ZEALAND

*Lilly, who suffered a turbulent and abusive childhood, was introduced “to the streets” at age 18—the year prostitution was legalized in New Zealand. Michelle, who also shares her story with us this month, similarly endured an abusive and violent childhood in New Zealand. Here is Lilly’s story:*

## I WOULD NEVER HAVE ENTERED PROSTITUTION IF IT WAS ILLEGAL.

I was brought up by stepparents [foster parents] from the age of 11 months. My real parents never had much to do with me—my father had 21 kids by approximately nine different women, and my mother had six kids by four different men. I was around a lot of domestic violence as a child. I was also a victim of child abuse. My stepdad had alcohol problems and was always violent towards my stepmum. I hated going home. School was like escape for me. I enjoyed school and learning. I feared my stepdad and was disgusted by him ‘cause he was a sleaze. I never trusted him from the age of 10, when I found him lying in my bed, drunk.

I ran away from my stepparents at 12 years old and worked in many different jobs. I ended up in Child Youth & Family (CYF) till I was 16 years old. CYF was in and out of my life throughout my childhood but never removed me from that family. But back then social workers were not as educated as the ones they have today. At age 16, I got discharged and had to survive on my own. I tried to build a good lifestyle for myself, but I was always dating guys who had nothing and treated me badly. I guess to me it was normal because I was brought up like that. The years of heart ache and pain from my family and then to guys I would date, made my self-esteem really low.

I would never have entered prostitution if it was illegal. It started with a friend introducing me to the streets

when I was just at the stage of wanting to leave my first boyfriend of a few years. I was in a relationship with this guy who I at first thought was loyal and faithful, but he would cheat on me, lie to me and treat me really badly. I would work full time and try and study and I would constantly worry if he was cheating on me. Then I decided one day that I was going to try prostitution as the government had made it legal that year. So I thought, ‘Well, if my partner is going to keep cheating on me, I might as well cheat back but get paid for it’. At least I’d get something out of it and not just let guys fuck me and get nothing from it. I was happy to know I got money in return. And I ended up leaving my boyfriend. It made me strong to leave my partner that was a dickhead and I realised there were plenty more fish in the sea. The first time I sold my body I was scared and disgusted, but relieved that I had \$100 in five minutes because it meant I could pay my board and survive.

When I first started, my life in the sex industry gave me independence. When I was just 18 years old I could afford to buy myself a car, clothes and shoes, and travel around New Zealand. I was brought up in a family where I was not important so I was not used to having things or asking people for things, ‘cause I had to learn to do things for myself growing up. The money I made from the streets was like a dream come true ‘cause I never had money like that in my life. But I didn’t know how to budget and I became addicted to money. Making \$500 a night by midnight was just so motivating.

Working as a street worker is not easy though. A lot of girls who work in prostitution on the streets were not educated about how important it is to use protection. So many don’t use condoms at all. I have a friend who started when she was 13 and now she has AIDS. She is now 29 and has given it to her son. I know many women in prostitution who have been raped and beaten. The only reason I could handle the street was because I was brought up in a violent home which prepared me for the violence on the street. You have to be street smart, street

wise and be able to defend and protect yourself. I could read body language and I could assess a potential client. You fight to earn respect so you can work in peace and don't get robbed by other girls or get kicked off the street by other street workers or their people, or even gangs. I was a fighter so I could protect and defend myself on the street and had gang affiliations which helped me when I needed to be protected. I was respected on the street where I worked.

I hated clients. The buyers are dogs, 90% of men are players. When I first started I had no respect for them. I thought they were idiots for buying sex, and some of them would try to steal the money back after sex. So I would just rob them 'cause I hated them and I knew I was worth more than any money they would give me.

I started in the sex industry when I was 18, when prostitution became legal, and remained in it for seven years. As I got older, I got fatter and my self-esteem got lower. Money was not that great anymore 'cause I couldn't stand there as much knowing that I didn't look the same as when I first started on the streets. I didn't realise how fast time was slipping by. When I look back I know I've wasted seven years of my life. I can only see negatives.

So many girls out there prostituting don't believe in themselves or in trying to do something different. Some are just brought up around it so they don't know anything else—it's just normal to them. With prostitution legal, I feel like it's easier to enter into prostitution and more difficult to exit. I think that underage prostitution has increased, and I saw more families prostituting together. For example, a mum and three daughters prostituting; aunts and cousins as well. And parents, uncles, brothers, cousins, boyfriends and mates would act as minders.

**TO HELP STOP SEX TRAFFICKING AND PROSTITUTION, YOU NEED TO GET RID OF THE BUYERS AND BE ABLE TO GET TO THE REASON WHY GIRLS ARE PROSTITUTING.**



**Read more about prostitution in New Zealand on page 41.**

At the moment I am out of the sex industry. It was not easy to find help to exit. I had no confidence, I was depressed, and I was addicted to fast money and the lifestyle. I was trapped for years before I met some lovely people from FREEDOM and Drug Arm who asked me if I wanted to leave and helped me to get out of prostitution. They've been helping me get a job in a profession I've always dreamed of, but never thought would come true. I have been going to a loving and caring church community who have been giving me the support I have never had but always wanted, and giving me the faith and encouragement to know I can do things. They are helping me with budgeting and good daycare for my daughter so I can work in a regular job. They have all helped to build my self-esteem which was really low when I was standing on the corner. To me, every girl has a different reason for why they prostitute. I had talent and was smart at school but I never had any support or guidance from family to help me make good decisions or give me the faith to carry on in following my dreams.

I want to get a stable job I enjoy and bring in a stable income so that I can live a better life in the future with my daughter. I feel like I wasted so many years when I could have had a regular career, so I feel like I'm starting a career late. Women think it's normal and ok but they lose sight of reality. I know I did because I had no support network and no good role model. I would never tell people in my office job that I was a former prostitute. I would never put my previous occupation as a prostitute on my C.V. To help stop sex trafficking and prostitution, you need to get rid of the buyers and be able to get to the reason why girls are prostituting. Being able to have services that can offer other opportunities, to educate you about other options in life, would be helpful.

I want to be able to support my daughter financially so she can pursue her dreams. I never got to reach my dream of being a famous artist because I didn't have any support from family or financial support which knocked my self-esteem down even lower. I felt like a nobody having no family, and being in prostitution didn't help my self-esteem as I got older. So I want to be able to give

support to my daughter financially, emotionally and mentally and just be there for her to reach her goals. Hopefully I will be able to travel so that I can reunite and get to know my real family and be able to give back to people who helped me through my struggles and thank them. And then I want to be able to help other people who are less fortunate than me.

i

### Prostitution in New Zealand

In 2003, New Zealand decriminalized most of the activities surrounding prostitution, including brothel-keeping and procuring sex, making the owning and operating of a brothel and 'managing' someone in prostitution legal. While the stated intention was to improve the safety, health and welfare of people in prostitution, many are concerned that this has not happened. Recent years have seen increased discussion in New Zealand on reforming prostitution legislation. Prime Minister John Key has criticized the impact of decriminalization, pointing out that it has not achieved its goals<sup>1</sup> of eliminating underage and street prostitution, stating: "The argument was that it would eliminate all the street workers and underage people, particularly girls, and the reports that we see in places like South Auckland is that it hasn't actually worked. I think it's been marginally successful, if at all."

1 "Prostitution law reform hasn't worked: PM." *Otago Daily Times*. 14 November 2012. Web. <http://www.odt.co.nz/news/politics/234736/prostitution-law-reform-hasnt-worked-pm>

## About Our Partners in New Zealand



**FREEDOM FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SLAVERY IN NEW ZEALAND:** Founded in 2012, Freedom from Sexual Exploitation<sup>1</sup> is a group of New Zealanders committed to seeing change in the areas of prostitution and the trafficking of women and children for sex in New Zealand.

The organization petitions parliament to follow the Nordic Model<sup>2</sup> (also known as the Swedish Model), and carries out awareness-raising, advocacy and campaigning work, together with women currently and formerly in prostitution.

**STOP DEMAND:** In 2003, Stop Demand<sup>3</sup> was founded in New Zealand to identify, challenge and seek a shift in the attitudes and beliefs that underpin and sustain all forms of sexual violence, sexual exploitation and sexual denigration of women and children.

With regard to the sex trade (prostitution, pornography, sex trafficking), Stop Demand focuses on the male demand that drives the global supply of women and children and encourages governments to combat the harms within prostitution by adopting the Nordic Model.

Stop Demand's key platform is education through public awareness raising, calling for local and global action, co-ordinating campaigns, mobilizing the community—in particular the male community, media engagement and collaborating with governmental and non-governmental agencies.

1 Freedom from Sexual Exploitation. Web. <http://www.ffse.org.nz/>

2 "What is the 'Nordic Model'?" Equality Now. Web. [http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Nordic\\_Model\\_EN.pdf](http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Nordic_Model_EN.pdf)

3 Stop Demand. Web. <http://www.stopdemand.org/>





Photo: Heidi Dunbar

# trisha

CANADA

PARTNER: **EVE**

# trisha

CANADA

I grew up in a middle class subdivision in Western Canada, the oldest of 3 kids to parents who had a very tumultuous relationship that involved many visits by the police. My parents finally separated when I was around 11, and my mother was plunged into poverty. With no help to process my life I acted out through drugs, smoking, alcohol, and anger, lots of anger. That erratic behavior was more than my mom could handle and a safety risk to my siblings, so I was placed into government care just before my 13th birthday. And I—like so many other kids in government care—fell prey to the predators that hover around group homes, foster homes, and anywhere vulnerable kids congregate.

In all honesty I don't remember my entry into the sex industry. Obviously I had a first time but I have no actual recollection of it. It just seemed to happen slowly over time. I don't know if it is my memory trying to save me from myself or if I was high. I know it was with an older man—I think he was in his 30s or 40s and I was around 13. I can see him and his long blonde hair in my mind but I don't remember what was said or how it played out.

THE VIOLENCE BECOMES NORMAL,  
THE DEROGATORY NAMES MEN  
CALL YOU BECOME NORMAL, THE  
FEELINGS OF SELF LOATHING  
AND SUCH BECOME NORMAL...WHICH  
IS WHY I GUESS THE DRINKING,  
DRUGS AND DYSFUNCTIONAL  
RELATIONSHIPS BECAME NORMAL.

An average day was what I thought was a party. High and drinking all the time. Not realizing the damage I was doing to myself, my loved ones, and later on, my kids. I was always trying to hide what I was doing from many people, saying I worked in a bar or a cocktail lounge, but I would find out later I failed miserably at keeping it a secret. Those years are a haze, they are a blur. I have to say a normal day was just something I was merely trying to survive. Every

day was “unnormal” in what I was doing, but when you are a part of that lifestyle it is what everyone is doing so it starts to become “normal.” The violence becomes normal, the derogatory names men call you become normal, the feelings of self loathing and such become normal...which is why I guess the drinking, drugs and dysfunctional relationships became normal.

It's hard to describe the exploitation—it was just everywhere, it was just a part of life. Girls would come to the corner I was working beat up or looking downcast because they had been emotionally abused by their pimp. There was this girl who tried working my corner, we got into a huge fight, and then I realized how young she was. I tried to protect her; she was supposed to be in a foster home, but she was being pimped out. Then one day, she just disappeared. I saw her pimp a few weeks later and asked him where she was. He just laughed and said, “She's gone. I sold her at a truck stop.”

At this time, we didn't have the language of trafficking or an understanding of exploitation. There weren't brothel owners, there were men or women who ran hotel rooms or apartments. There weren't pimps, there were “boyfriends” or brothers—seemingly someone who cared about you. Later on, I realized that in the industry, unless you were currently being prostituted, you were an exploiter, that's just how it was. If you were making money off of someone else's exploitation you were an exploiter.

So many people today have this image of a trafficking victim tied up in a room or black and blue with bruises—they don't understand that many of the girls and women being trafficked are in love with their traffickers or pimps, and that these exploiters use subtle coercion, not just outright violence. The relationships are multi layered, complex; remember most exploiters have been at this for years and they know the best way to control a prostituted woman is through mental and emotional manipulation. The upside for them is this doesn't leave bruises. I knew a pimp who actually went to community

college to take psychology to control his girls; he just saw it as an investment of his time.

I was involved in the sex industry for 15 years, from age 13 to 28. I am now out and have been for about 13 years. I was able to leave because of a relationship I formed with an outreach worker. She broke all the rules and we actually became friends, and through that friendship which continues to this day, she showed me a lifestyle that was completely different than mine. Something that in time I decided I wanted for my kids and for myself.

I think I would've been able to exit earlier if there were agencies that could be accessed more anonymously. I was extremely private and was embarrassed to walk into agencies where everyone knew what they did there. Since I thought I was keeping my working from friends and loved ones, I didn't want to do "groups," but I did want help. I was successful in leaving because of my friend, the outreach worker who was willing to meet me where I was, on my terms. It is my understanding that now there are agencies that operate like this—we should be replicating this and offering women a viable way out to a healthier life. It would have also been highly useful to have a livable welfare rate so that I and many, many others wouldn't have had to work in prostitution in the first place. Knowing I would be able to provide for my kids even if I quit prostitution like I wanted to would have made all the difference.

As of right now I have my GED [General Education Development] with no "formal" work experience. I would like to go back to school, maybe get a communications degree. I will continue to work towards the abolition of prostitution.

TO STOP SEX TRAFFICKING  
AND PROSTITUTION, I THINK  
GOING AFTER THE ROOT OF  
THE PROBLEM IS THE BIGGEST  
HELP AND THE ROOT IS THE  
MALE DEMAND FOR PAID  
SEXUAL ACCESS TO WOMEN AND  
CHILDREN'S BODIES.

*[Trisha became more vocal in speaking out about the abuses of the sex industry after writing about the 2006-2007 murder trial of convicted serial killer Robert Pickton—most of whose victims were women in prostitution and many of whom were known to Trisha. In 2009 she founded **EVE** (formerly Exploited Voices now Educating), a volunteer, non-governmental, non-profit organization composed of former sex-industry women dedicated to abolishing prostitution as a form of violence against women. She is a leading activist in the campaign calling on the Canadian government to reform its prostitution laws so that women in prostitution are decriminalized and provided with much-needed services, while sex buyers, pimps and brothel owners are criminalized.]*

To stop sex trafficking and prostitution, I think going after the root of the problem is the biggest help and the root is the male demand for paid sexual access to women and children's bodies. We need to stop viewing prostituted persons as part of the problem. They are out there for a myriad of reasons and they need help and support not condemnation and judgment, which is why we should be working to decriminalize the sold and criminalize the demand. This is the best chance for women to get out of prostitution and to hold the right people accountable for their actions. In the long run it will actually work towards the actual END of prostitution. The buyers need to be stopped. Male orgasm should no longer be allowed to dictate women's oppression and that is exactly what it is currently doing. The male demand keeps the whole cycle going and they need to be held accountable for the abuse they are perpetrating. They should face legal consequences for using their power and money to take advantage of women and girls' desperation.

If we decriminalize prostitution we'd be saying it's open season on our women especially our marginalized and vulnerable, when it's them we should be protecting the most. We would be standing in agreement with the eroticization of poverty, the ignoring of mental health issues, colonization, addiction, and racism—instead of dealing with them we will be offering them up to men's sexual demands and saying that this is acceptable. We would be saying that this is sexy and let's take advantage

of it. The marginalized and vulnerable would be more marginalized and vulnerable because no one would be helping them or looking out for them. And men would be on their worst behavior; because everyone would be saying what you're doing is ok. Violence will increase.

Sweden decriminalized the prostituted and criminalized the demand. At the beginning it will be a very hard transition, but Sweden seems to have done it and I think Canada can also be a country that is working to see the end of prostitution.



## About EVE

**EVE<sup>1</sup>** (formerly Exploited Voices now Educating) is a volunteer, non-governmental, non-profit organization founded in 2009. The organization is composed of former sex-industry women dedicated to seeing prostitution recognized as violence against women and calling for its abolition through political action, advocacy, and awareness

raising that focuses on ending the demand for paid sexual access to women and children's bodies. EVE operates under a feminist model, acknowledging that prostitution is born out of sexism, classism, racism, poverty and other forms of systemic oppression.

EVE advocates for the criminalization of the male demand for paid sex, pimping, trafficking and procuring and brothel-keeping, and the decriminalization and support of the prostituted. This includes offering long-term, consistent services and counselling to women exiting prostitution.

<sup>1</sup> EVE. 2011. Web. <http://www.educating-voices.com/index.html>

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### Read about our other Canadian partners

**Sextrade101: Public Awareness and Education<sup>1</sup>**, a survivor-led organization based in Toronto, encompasses a diverse group of women raising public awareness and providing public education on all aspects of the sex trade. As sex trade experts—"front-line workers, speakers, advocates, and activists for the rights of sex trafficking victims and prostitution survivors"—the group works to eradicate myths and stereotypes about prostitution, and replace them with facts and stories direct from women who have experienced the sex industry.

Members of Sextrade101 believe that everyone should be shown a viable way out of the sex trade, rather than being encouraged to stay in it. They believe in helping people understand the full picture of life in prostitution before they get involved, and in helping women get out alive with their minds, bodies, and lives intact.

The organization provides comprehensive services, facilitated by survivors, including training, mentoring, court support/advocacy, counselling, safety planning, temporary housing and street outreach.

**The London Abused Women's Centre<sup>2</sup>** is an organization based in London, Ontario, which offers abused women "hope and help for their hurt" through the provision of advocacy, counselling and support services in a safe, non-crisis, non-residential setting. Their mission is to provide long term feminist counselling, advocacy, and support to abused women.

EVE, SexTrade101 and the London Abused Women's Centre have been working together to advocate for the Nordic Model to be adopted in Canada, including through a 2014 postcard campaign<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> SexTrade101. 2009. Web. <http://www.sextrade101.com/>

<sup>2</sup> The London Abused Women's Centre. Web. <http://lawc.on.ca/>

<sup>3</sup> Moore, Avery. "Postcard Campaign to Protect Prostituted Women." *Blackburn News*. 7 February 2014. Web. <http://blackburnnews.com/london/2014/02/07/postcard-campaign-to-protect-prostituted-women/>





Photo: Noah McLaurine

# rebecca

UNITED KINGDOM

PARTNER: **SEX TRAFFICKING  
SURVIVORS UNITED**

# rebecca

UNITED KINGDOM

*I was prostituted from 14 till I was 27. I got out because I chose to live. The guy I was with was very violent and I ended up in hospital. I remember the nurse yelled at me for being a prostitute. She sewed me up without anaesthesia and I left the hospital. I was paralysed for 3 days. Those 3 days made me think. I decided to catch a train and leave without knowing where I was going. I was in prostitution on and off for 3 years after that, but that was the beginning of my exit.*

I COULD HEAR WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN OTHER ROOMS AND WOULD THINK, AT LEAST WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME ISN'T AS BAD. YOU HAVE TO SURVIVE. IF I SAW SOMEONE ELSE LOOKING SCARED, I'D THINK AT LEAST THAT'S NOT ME. IT'S HARD FOR ME TO LIVE WITH THE FACT THAT I KNOW SOME WOMEN DISAPPEARED—I FEEL GUILTY.

I was abused by my step-father from the age of six. I told my mother but she didn't care. She was just concerned about me not getting pregnant. There was a club in our town where if you were a girl and under 16, the bouncers would let you in for free at the end of the night. My friend, who, like me, was completely fucked up and hated the world, took me there. It was strange because we were told to sit at the bar, not talk to each other and were given lots of cocktails. It all felt very sophisticated. I was 14. On that first night some men took me to a flat and gang raped me for 6 hours. There was a queue of men outside the door; one would finish and another would come in. Now, when I look back, it feels like it was a test to see if I would be a good prostitute. I don't know how I made it out alive.

Although I didn't go back immediately, I did return with my friend because I didn't care about myself. She would take the money while I had sex with often violent men. I 'worked' there for 3 years. I could hear

what was happening in other rooms and would think, at least what's happening to me isn't as bad. You have to survive. If I saw someone else looking scared, I'd think at least that's not me. It's hard for me to live with the fact that I know some women disappeared—I feel guilty.

I was often truant from school but attended till I was 18. From 17 upwards, an average day was trying not to sleep as much as possible. I'd go to pubs and have people buy me drinks. There was a regular at the pub who was known to be violent to women and to pick up prostitutes. I used to be seen with him in the pub, but no-one ever said anything to me. I'm not saying they could have stopped me, but they didn't even try.

ONE PUNTER ACTUALLY RESUSCITATED ME AND THEN CARRIED ON DOING WHAT HE WAS DOING TO ME. I WAS GETTING TO THE POINT WHERE I WANTED TO KILL THE PUNTERS OR MYSELF.

Loads of men who were abusive to me were white and English, but there were also men from other nationalities and countries. It was the time of the anti-apartheid movement. Outwardly they portrayed themselves as so good. Some would actually talk to me about human rights while they were doing horrible things to me! One punter (slang term for men who buy sex) actually resuscitated me and then carried on doing what he was doing to me. I was getting to the point where I wanted to kill the punters or myself. Always being surrounded by people who wanted to kill me made me think I should commit suicide as that would piss them off!

I would see injuries on me after punters had used me and not know where they'd come from. I mentally closed down. My body had been pushed to the limit but it didn't die. At the time I thought I was choosing punters, but now I realise that men knew they could

offer me money and that they could be violent towards me; it was a small town and they knew through word of mouth. Now when I look back, I see that there was a hell of a lot of organisation behind what happened to me.

For the longest time I hated going to the cinema as normally punters would take me there to have sex. When men found out I read, some would buy me books like *Lolita* and *Marquis de Sade*. I once set fire to a copy of *Lolita*. My step-father used to read *Marquis de Sade* to me at bedtime.

I also did that escort “girlfriend” thing, which is a total mind fuck because even if they treat you well, they still get all the sex they want any way they want. Many wanted to see me regularly. One guy kept me in his flat for 8 days. That messed with my head because I would start thinking like he was my boyfriend, when he wasn’t. He would lock me up in the flat before he’d go out. We’d watch American football on TV. If he saw me looking bored he’d rape me. At least men who are cold and violent don’t fuck with your brain!

I GOT LOTS OF BACKLASH FROM PEOPLE WHO TALK ABOUT PROSTITUTION BEING A CHOICE AND PEOPLE WHO SAY I COULDN’T HAVE BEEN A PROSTITUTE BECAUSE I’M MIDDLE-CLASS OR TOO EDUCATED. WITHIN A MONTH, HOWEVER, I STARTED GETTING A STRONG RESPONSE AND NOW I USE IT TO BE POLITICAL AND TO TALK ABOUT THE TRAUMA ASSOCIATED WITH PROSTITUTION.

As an escort most of the guys who bought me were very rich—many were training to become leaders in their own countries. Some of them are now in positions of



Read more about prostitution in the UK page 49.

power. People disconnect prostitution from other rights abuses. It makes me cynical about governments and those that run them.

Punters are so arrogant. If you’re going to be a bastard, it’s easier to stick to prostituted women because no one really listens to or believes

prostitutes. One reason men are angry with prostitutes is because they can’t destroy them. Most men don’t want to use condoms—they don’t come to prostitutes for that. If someone had given me a condom I wouldn’t have had the self-esteem to use one. I didn’t feel like I deserved to live or not get a disease. I look back at the escorting and think those punters really hated me.

A lot of men were in denial about what they were doing so they would pay me with food or alcohol or give me a bed for the night. The guys who thought they were gentle or talked a lot, I hated the most. They wanted to know things about me as a human being, while they wanted to do all these things to me. I hate the punters and the way they make so many excuses for what they do. I hate that what they do is justified by society. I don’t know how any man can justify buying a human being either, just so they can have an orgasm! I hate that they made me feel I should be grateful to them. I feel like they put poison in me.

I started a [blog](#) just after the 2006 [Ipswich murders](#) (I’ve always noticed they only report these things when it’s a serial killer and then it’s always about the guy not the women). In Manchester I got lots of backlash from people who talk about prostitution being a choice and people who say I couldn’t have been a prostitute because I’m middle-class or too educated. Within a month, however, I started getting a strong response and now I use it to be political and to talk about the trauma associated with prostitution. I also contribute to Sex Trafficking Survivors United online forum. I campaign for abolition and changing laws.

## Prostitution in the UK

The commercial sex trade exists in many forms throughout the UK. This includes street prostitution and a larger, booming 'indoor' sex industry—taking place in brothels, massage parlours and via online escort services—thriving especially in larger cities like London<sup>1</sup>. Several activities around prostitution are criminalised, but laws around prostitution and sex trafficking are incoherent<sup>2</sup>, inconsistent and confusing and are therefore applied unevenly and sometimes barely at all. Much of the law enforcement focus continues to be on women in prostitution, rather than on pimps, brothel owners and buyers.

Foreign-born nationals are trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation from countries such as Nigeria, as well as Eastern European countries including Romania, Slovakia and Hungary. There has been increased awareness and reporting in recent years of internal trafficking within the UK, including of cases where the victims were primarily British girls living in state care homes or were experiencing neglect at home, and of the sexual exploitation of young British women and girls from ethnic and religious minority backgrounds<sup>3</sup>.

**Research** shows high levels of violence, exploitation and abuse of women and girls (and boys and men) in both on-street and indoor<sup>4</sup> prostitution across the UK. Homicide, physical and sexual assault and harassment at the hands of buyers, pimps, partners, traffickers, passers-by, law enforcement and others is widespread.

1 Bindel, Julie, et. al. "Capital Exploits: A Study of Prostitution and Trafficking in London." June 2013. Web.

<http://i3.cmsfiles.com/eaves/2013/06/Capital-Exploits-June-2013.pdf-da8819.pdf>

2 Osborne, Hannah. "Nordic Model of Prostitution in England & Wales Called for By MP Gavin Shuker in Report." *International Business Times*. 3 March 2014. Web.

<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/nordic-model-prostitution-england-wales-called-by-mp-gavin-shuker-report-1438676>

3 Gohir, Shaista. "Unheard Voices: The Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women." Muslim Women's Network UK. September 2013. Web.

[http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go\\_files/resources/UnheardVoices.pdf](http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/UnheardVoices.pdf)

4 "New Eaves report highlights the barriers for women to exit prostitution." *Eaves*. 6 November 2012. Web.

<http://www.eavesforwomen.org.uk/news-events/news/new-eaves-report-highlights-the-barriers-for-women-to-exit-prostitution>

## About Rebecca and Sex Trafficking Survivors United

Rebecca is a UK-based survivor-activist, blogger and campaigner (see '*Letter to a Punter*' on the next page). She posts regularly on her widely-read blog, **Exited Woman's Exploration**<sup>1</sup>, and is a founding member of **Sex Trafficking Survivors United** (STSU)<sup>2</sup>, an international survivor-led organisation made up of women and men who have experienced sexual exploitation. STSU has over 177 members worldwide and campaigns for the Nordic Model, which criminalises the demand side of prostitution while decriminalising and providing support for people in prostitution.

1 Exited Woman's Exploration. Web. <http://rebeccamott.net/>

2 Sex Trafficking Survivors United. Web. <http://www.sextraffickingsurvivorsunited.org/>



## LETTER TO A PUNTER

Dear I have no words to name you,

I am writing not because I think you will see this, or if by some chance you do, that you'll be able to comprehend what I saying. No, I write as a personal release for the many performances that I had to give to make you believe I was your Happy Hooker.

I was never happy. At best I was bored, at the very best I was relatively safe—but those times were very rare. Most of the time you, and all the other endless punters that had me, were violent, full of rage and hate, and filled with a cold violence that nearly killed me. I was often tortured by men like you.

All of you do not consider what you do to me to be harmful. You would never consider yourself to be violent; you do not think you have a rage against women. You would say you respect the prostituted—I suppose you would call me a sex worker. You think you are a good guy.

Well, I write to say you can never be the good guy.

A good guy would never even think of buying and owning a prostitute for his selfish sexual wants.

See that—you were selfish when you bought me and other prostitutes. I have heard in your excuse that you “need” sex—like it is impossible to masturbate. No you need a living body under you—even if she is the living dead—to masturbate into. It is not mutual sex—it is you fucking the prostitute who is stripped of the right to safety, the right to turn you away, the right to say no to any sexual act you pay for, especially the dangerous and terrifying ones.

You refuse to see, or, if you do see the prostitute's terror or deadness, you make the choice not to give a damn. As the consumer, you will get your money's worth.

Now, I would love it if you could just be honest about the real reason you bought me.

Don't speak to me of respect, of it as a sexual adventure, that you thought I was attractive/interesting, that I would do things your girlfriend/wife won't, that it was fine 'cause it was not sleazy like street prostitution. Stop lying and face the truth.

You buy prostitutes because you know you have complete power and control over another human—buying a prostitute is like buying a slave.

You buy a prostitute knowing she can be raped, battered, murdered, and more than likely, there will be no consequences. You know you can damage her because she is just goods to you. You know she is sub-human.

That is what you are buying—I don't care how you sweeten it.

I want you to know that I and most other prostitutes always hated you. Sure we pasted on the whore's smile, sure we told you that you were a stud and no man could do what you did, sure we told we love being a prostitute.

But know that we lied to survive. Sometimes, if we flattered you enough, the violence was less. Sometimes the right words meant you just penetrated our vaginas and didn't sexually torture us in other ways. Making you happy sometimes kept us safe.

But in our hearts, we wanted to murder you. I cannot tell you how many times I thought of putting a pillow over your head. How many times I wanted to give you just a small taste of the terror and pain that men like you made my everyday existence.

We were better than you could ever be—for we did not use violence as you did. You were lucky, for the rage inside a prostitute could destroy you. I write this hoping it shows you just how hellish you made my life. I am not sure if makes sense—but that is what your hate has left me with.

You gave me extreme trauma. Trauma from knowing that I had no control or way out as you used my body as your living porn playground. Trauma from having horrific body memories of all the pain you poured into me, which, at the time, I was too dead to feel. Trauma from the grief of knowing men like you stole my teenage and young adulthood years.

I hate you—unless you know you are a criminal—that hate will always be there.

You were never innocent—but you destroyed my right to have innocence.

—Rebecca, United Kingdom

# HIGHLIGHTS AND LESSONS FROM THE SURVIVOR STORIES SERIES

## Raising Visibility of Survivor Leadership and Grassroots Work

While survivors are experts with valuable insight, their voices are too often marginalized or left out of the discussion. The Survivor Stories series amplifies survivor voices and raises the visibility of those who understand the issue of commercial sexual exploitation better than anyone. During the first year, more than 61,000 people visited the Survivor Stories site to read and learn from these testimonies, and the campaign has been featured in international news outlets, including the Guardian, New York Times International, CNN, Huffington Post, Ms. Magazine, and Haaretz. Hundreds of thousands of people engaged with the series on social media prompting additional explorations of the issues arising from the testimonies.

“I am very happy that **my story** was launched and that many people can read it...Survivor leadership is very important; in advocacy and campaigning on issues of trafficking and prostitution. If the leader is a survivor, this has a big impact on the community and people, especially speaking about these issues. The survivor stories project has helped us advocate in our campaign to end the buying of women and children.”

*-Alma, Buklod Centre, Philippines*

With survivors and our NGO partners, we have combined the series with a broader #ListenToSurvivors social media campaign to focus attention on the critical need to listen to and learn from the experiences of survivors, and to call on policymakers and top officials to enact policies and laws that take survivors' voices and experiences into account.

## Recognizing Prostitution as Gender-Based Violence

“When people tell me that women choose this life, I can't help but laugh. Do they know how many women like us have tried to escape, but have been beaten black and blue when they are caught? To the men who buy us, we are like meat. To everybody else in society, we simply do not exist.”

*-Ayesha, India*

Throughout the series, we hear from women and girls who were exploited in both legal and illegal prostitution sectors, in street prostitution, and in brothels and apartments. Their experiences show the risk of violence and exploitation inherent in the prostitution industry, regardless of venue, and dispel myths such as prostitution being a 'victimless crime' and a 'job like any other'.

- Eight of the 15 women in the series experienced sexual abuse or violence before they were trafficked or prostituted; often the perpetrators were family members, caregivers, or in a position of authority.
- While each girl or woman's entry into prostitution was different, many entered at a young age and were coerced, deceived or manipulated by a friend or relative. At least eight of the survivors entered the commercial sex industry as children; four were coerced or trafficked into prostitution by a relative, and three by a boyfriend.
- Ten of the survivors describe experiencing abuse or violence at the hands of sex buyers, and eight discuss violence from pimps or brothel-owners.
- Four of the women said they were not able to negotiate or insist on condom use, for various reasons, even in legal brothels.

These common threads, no matter the location, teach us that while each survivor has a unique story to share, entry into and experience within the commercial sex industry is often marked by gender-based violence and discrimination.

“One punter (slang term for men who buy sex) actually resuscitated me and then carried on doing what he was doing to me. I was getting to the point where I wanted to kill the punters or myself. (...) I would see injuries on me after punters had used me and not know where they’d come from. I mentally closed down. My body had been pushed to the limit but it didn’t die. At the time I thought I was choosing punters, but now I realise that men knew they could offer me money and that they could be violent towards me.”

-Rebecca Mott, UK

## Addressing Factors that Put Women and Girls at Risk

The testimonies make clear the roles that gender inequality and discrimination, poverty, racism and failing foster care systems play in making women and girls vulnerable to exploitation. Throughout the series, we see how legalizing the prostitution industry, while often promoted with the argument that it will protect women and girls, instead **perpetuates violence and exploitation**. In fact, five of the survivors who shared their experiences described being exploited in legal brothels or establishments.

“By legalising prostitution men are being told by the government that it’s perfectly ok to purchase a woman. Women are not commodities to be bought and sold. Legalisation normalises something that is far from normal.”

-Sam, Australia

We hear from many survivors that targeting the demand for commercial sex—the sex buyers—is key to ending exploitation and trafficking. Through Ruth’s story, we witness the all too common experience many sex trafficking victims— even children— face: being arrested for prostitution and treated as a criminal. The critical need for comprehensive support and services for those who want to escape prostitution and start rebuilding their lives, is re-iterated by nearly all of the survivors.

Having and implementing a comprehensive, human rights and gender equality-based legal and policy framework which addresses these aspects, is crucial to protecting and promoting the human rights of women and girls. Guided by survivors and our NGO partners, Equality Now advocates for critical law and policy reform to effectively tackle sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. This means calling on policymakers to ensure that women and girls in prostitution are *not* criminalized but rather, are provided with support services, and that sex buyers, pimps, brothel keepers and traffickers *are* held accountable under the law. Some examples:

- In New York, with **Ruth, Janelle, Lowyal and Veronica**, we advocated for reforms to the state anti-trafficking law. On 22 June 2013 the legislature **passed a bill** ensuring that 16 and 17-year-old victims arrested for prostitution will be classified as trafficking victims, instead of as criminals, allowing them to access services rather than being sent to prison.
- In Canada, with survivor activist **Trisha** and other partners, we called on the Canadian government to introduce a strong law that addresses the demand for prostitution that fuels sex trafficking. On 4 June 2014, the Canadian government **proposed a law** that would address demand for the first time, and would provide C\$20 million for services for people exploited in the commercial sex industry. We continue work to ensure that the law fully decriminalizes women in prostitution.
- At the global level, with **survivors around the world**, we **called on United Nations agencies** to listen to survivors, uphold international law, and ensure that HIV prevention efforts do not jeopardize anti-trafficking

and gender equality efforts. Survivors and supporters sent thousands of letters to the agencies, and in response, UNAIDS **clarified** that it does not support the decriminalization of pimping or brothel-keeping.

Through these campaigns, as well as broader initiatives to address violence and discrimination against women and girls, we will continue to call on policymakers to listen to and learn from survivors when creating and implementing policies and laws on these issues.

## Moving Forward

For more than 20 years Equality Now, in partnership with survivors and grassroots organizations, has worked to combat sex trafficking and exploitation. Along with many of the survivors featured in this series, we believe that the most effective way to end sex trafficking is by addressing demand for commercial sex. Such a strategy includes decriminalizing victims and providing them with rehabilitative and other services while criminalizing traffickers, pimps and buyers of sex. This approach, frequently termed the ‘**Nordic Model**’, has been proven effective in curbing sex trafficking and is gaining policy consideration by governments around the world.

We invite you to use Survivor Stories as a resource to help raise awareness of sex trafficking, dispel myths regarding the commercial sex industry and sex trafficking, and galvanize policymakers, activists and the wider the public to #ListenToSurvivors and take action to implement laws and policies to end these human rights abuses. With your participation and support, we will continue to advocate side-by-side with survivor activists and grassroots partners to end sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation around the world!

“The world has started listening to sex trafficking/prostitution survivors. We are in the midst of a fast-growing survivor movement. It started with indigenous women speaking out about the terrible effects of sexual exploitation on their communities. A mighty wave is rising, the wave of survivor voices. Nothing can stop it... But precious few survivors are leading anti-trafficking NGOs at the national or international level. None that I am aware of have received government or UN appointments...If we are to progress, the movement must follow the lead of survivors and indigenous women, the ones who are most affected by the violence of commercial sexual exploitation.”

*-Holly Sorensen, Sex Trafficking Survivors United, US*

“To stop sex trafficking and prostitution, I think going after the root of the problem is the biggest help and the root is the male demand for paid sexual access to women and children’s bodies.”

*-Trisha Baptie, EVE, Canada*

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*The Book Club*—based in Los Angeles, this club of seven women is dedicated to creating a kinder more equitable world.

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