

Selah Freedom

Bringing Light Into The Darkness Of Sex Trafficking

By Debra Pitell-Hauge

"The average age of entry into sex trafficking is 12-14 years old. At least 92% of all girls sold were sexually abused as a child. Ask me how you can help stop sex trafficking."

Florida is one of the top three states in the nation for sex trafficking. The survivors that Selah Freedom serves are local and were sold for sex right here in Sarasota, Manatee and Hillsborough Counties. It is estimated that 100,000-300,000 American children are sold into sex slavery every year and Southwest Florida is a hub for sex trafficking.

Selah Freedom actively confronts the issue of sex trafficking and is upheld as the statewide model for how to effectively bring solutions to survivors of sex trafficking & exploitation. Selah is a Hebrew word which means to pause, rest, and reflect. Selah Freedom gives survivors a chance to do just that. Women in their programs have an opportunity to dream again; to discover who it is they were created to be.

In 2009, Selah Freedom's founders discovered the horrifying truth that local children were being bought and sold for sex right here in our own communities. What began as the grassroots initiative of women from across the country to be a voice for the voiceless, has quickly transformed into a thriving organization with four foundational programs: Awareness, Prevention, Outreach, and Residential.

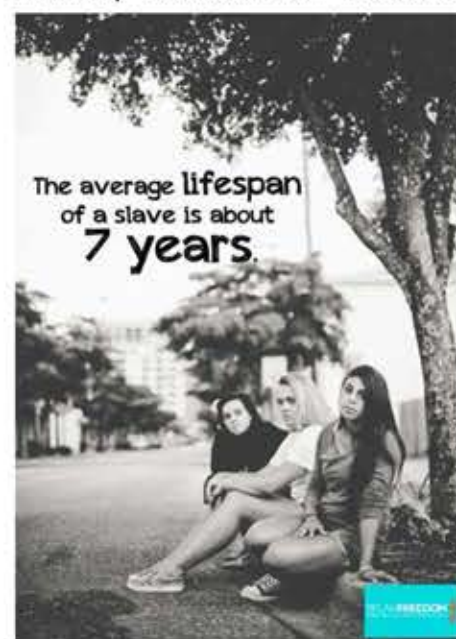
AWARENESS

Selah Freedom brings awareness about sex trafficking and exploitation to

over 20,000 people annually through their Speakers Bureau and presence at community events. They educate the public, church groups, clubs, students, etc. through dynamic and moving presentations on domestic sex trafficking. Selah Freedom also provides education to professionals and community members through CSEC 101 (Commercial Exploitation of Children), and Global Training.

PREVENTION

Selah Freedom is the only organization in our region certified to bring the nationally acclaimed Teen Prevention



Program, My Life, My Choice to girls between the ages of 12 – 17. Originally out of Boston, this survivor-written and survivor-led curriculum has proven to lower the chances of girls being sexually/commercially exploited by over 90%!

My Life, My Choice is a ten-week program that works to stem the tide of commercial sexual exploitation by harnessing girls' strength, resilience, and outrage. It directly benefits those most at-risk – adolescent girls, particularly those abused, neglected, or exposed to family violence and addiction - that are especially vulnerable to recruitment by pimps. In 2006, the United States Department of Justice recognized this program as a national model for sex trafficking prevention.

OUTREACH

Selah Freedom provides outreach on the streets and in the jails through their sex trade support group, led by Selah Freedom's Director of Outreach and Law Enforcement Liaison, Kindsey Pentecost. Kindsey has a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice and is certified with the Florida Crime Prevention Training Institute for Human Trafficking. She partners with the Sarasota and Bradenton Police Departments, Sarasota County Sheriff and Manatee County Sheriff as the first point of contact for women identified as sex trafficking victims or at high risk of being recruited into sex trafficking.



"Human Trafficking is a horrible reality that many are forced into every day. Those who have been hurt and those providing them aid need our support. I'm grateful for organizations like Selah Freedom who work to help bring healing to those who have lived through these tragic circumstances and survived."

-Steve Crisafulli, Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives

"Whenever I am asked, 'Who are the NGO's in Florida having the greatest positive impact?', the first group that comes to mind is Selah Freedom. In my opinion, no single organization has done more in the continuing struggle to end human trafficking."

-Ross Spano, Florida State Representative

Survivors who are still "in the life" are able to attend weekly groups and receive the resources they need, as well as build a trusting relationship with Selah Freedom. Once a woman is ready to step into freedom and leave the abusive lifestyle she has been trapped in, Selah Freedom is able to bring her into a place of safety and restoration. Selah Freedom provides case management to survivors through their Outreach Program where they receive resources, job placement, counseling, legal assistance and more.

Selah Freedom has also aligned with law enforcement and the State Attorney's Office to spearhead TYLA (Turn Your Life Around). The TYLA initiative is a partnership between the Sarasota Police Department and Selah Freedom that employs community outreach, diversion, and a re-directed law enforcement philosophy. TYLA serves over 100 women annually. TYLA provides support in the form of case management, counseling, job training, and residential services. TYLA is also supportive during judicial proceedings and is committed to the victims held in bondage within the various levels of sex trafficking.

RESIDENTIAL

The Residential Program is a holistic approach to restoration. Survivors, who have had everything stolen from them, get the stability and rest they need to dream again! They can accomplish goals they never knew were possible to tackle - things like getting their GED, driver's license, and learning to swim.

Selah Freedom provides a three-phase

Residential Program to survivors of sex trafficking and exploitation, with two safe houses in the Southwest Florida area. First, survivors enter the Rest Phase, which allows them to reflect and decide if they are prepared to move forward with stepping into the new life Selah Freedom offers.

The second phase is the Restore Phase, where women receive a personalized education plan, medical aid, trauma therapy, job placement, case management, and restorative services. They also have the opportunity to build healthy and safe relationships that will follow them into their final stage of the program.

The final stage is the Relaunch Phase, in which survivors receive individualized planning and assistance with living independently, career goals, and continued support. Selah Freedom is there with them every step of the way through their transformation!

UNDERSTANDING TRAFFICKING

Is it like the movie "Taken"? Are people abducted by force?

Not really. Only 10% of domestic sex trafficking victims fit that profile. The typical client Selah Freedom serves is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. One out of 3 girls are sexually abused, many as young as 3-4 years of age, by someone they know—a parent or step-parent, church leader or neighbor. The abuse usually lasts for many years. The child experiencing severe abuse will usually run away by the age of 12 and within 48 hours 80% will be coerced into some

form of sex trafficking by a trafficker or pimp. The predators on the street target these runaways by convincing them that they will provide security, housing and food for them. They falsely claim that they understand how difficult life on the street is, only to get them hooked on drugs and tricked into sex trafficking to earn their keep. A child that gets taken into the sex trade lifestyle usually stays 7 years; being sold up to 40 times a day.

Having questions about sex trafficking & exploitation is very common. Selah Freedom is here to help bring some clarity to the issue. If you would like to hear more about sex trafficking and how Selah Freedom is on the front lines confronting this issue please contact Selah Freedom. They are here to help.

Sex trafficking is happening in your community.

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