



SPOTLIGHT

Darkness to Light NC Ministries Serve Trafficking Victims

written by:
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This article appears in the Spring 2015 edition of *Family North Carolina* magazine, a publication of the North Carolina Family Policy Council.



“It’s really a dark issue.”¹

“It’s just a hard, hard, life.”²

Since state lawmakers enacted major legislation aimed at curbing the prevalence of human sex trafficking in North Carolina, a growing number of individuals and groups have stepped up to start, assist, and grow ministries to help and support victims of the modern slave trade. Although such ministries existed prior to the 2013 Safe Harbor/Victims of Human Trafficking law, leaders like Emily Fitchpatrick of On Eagles Wings credit the legislation with heightening awareness of the problem in North Carolina. She has seen “more people stepping up and helping and getting trained,” as well as more survivors getting much-needed services, and more overlooked victims being identified.³

While numerous ministries reach out to trafficking survivors in North Carolina, this article profiles three ministries that represent unique services and support that human trafficking survivors desperately need to leave the darkness of the sex trade, and to find healing and hope.

On Eagles Wings

Emily Fitchpatrick is leading a multi-faceted ministry to assist victims of human trafficking, as well as to engage the community and youth. On Eagles Wings Ministries (OEWWM) works in the Charlotte area to “restore females that have been sexually exploited through the commercial sex industry with emphasis on prevention, outreach, empowerment, and aftercare.”⁴ OEWWM interacts with about 50 female survivors of trafficking each year through three local ministries—Hope House, Fields of Hope, and Youth 4 Abolition. The variety of ministries allows OEWWM “to take a more holistic approach to addressing the issue,” according to founder

and executive director Fitchpatrick. She founded OEWM in 2008 in response to what she describes as a “kind of apathy for our girls here ... in our own backyard.” Fitchpatrick wants every woman in the sex industry “to know they have value, ... [that] people believe in them,” and to receive the “nurturing and empowerment to really move forward with goals.”⁵

Before healing can really begin, survivors’ immediate needs must be met. Hope House provides a “residential care program for domestic minor victims of sex trafficking.” Housing up to six girls ages 12-21 for about a one year program, the group home offers “a holistic, trauma-informed model of care,” where the girls receive schooling, therapy, mentoring, healthcare, life skills training, and more. To empower these women, Fields of Hope aims to help survivors find and keep steady employment. This year-long professional development and leadership paid internship program for sex trade survivors teaches women to make handmade products to sell. Prevention is also vital, which is why OEWM introduced Youth 4 Abolition. Members of the chapters “go through a 12 lesson human trafficking educational curriculum and participate in educating their peers on the issue,” all with the goal of preventing more young people from falling prey to traffickers.⁶

Restore One

Anna and Chris Smith, a young married couple in eastern North Carolina, are undertaking the first known efforts in the nation to provide a safe haven for male youth who have been sexually trafficked. Male victims are often over-looked or treated as a mere addendum when it comes to

outreach and legislation aimed at helping victims of sex trafficking. “We are coming up against the general belief that men and boys should be able to toughen up and don’t need the same services as women,” says Anna. A 2008 Canadian report entitled “Under the Radar” found that boys who had been sexually trafficked overwhelmingly requested some sort of housing assistance.⁷ In

and trying to survive.” Anna says that “at any point, [traumatic memories] can be triggered” for sex trafficking survivors. The enduring nature of their wounds is why she says it is so important “to provide restorative care that allows them a safe space to be able to walk through these memories, and to find healing.” According to Anna, that is the ultimate hope of Anchor House—that these survivors “won’t live in depression the rest

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response, the Smiths founded Restore One in 2012 and began planning Anchor House Home.

Currently in the building phase, the home will offer a yearlong four-tiered HOPE program for about a dozen boys ages 12-18 that is “designed to meet the psychological, physical, and sociological needs of sex trafficked and sexually exploited boys.”⁸ The program will use “holistic approaches and proven clinical methods that nurture healing and restoration,” including the chance to complete school, group and individual therapy sessions, mentoring, restorative care, alternative therapies like yoga and therapy animals, and job skills training.⁹

Anna, who has a background in social work, said many survivors of human trafficking suffer from severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). “They’re out of the life,” she says, “but their brain doesn’t let them think they are [free] because they were constantly underneath a life or death situation

of their lives.... They’ll be able to start forming new relationships and healthy relationships because we believe that God allows the brain to heal.”¹⁰

JusticeMatters

The international nature of some human trafficking operations means many victims must battle through immigration laws in addition to emotional, psychological, and physical wounds. JusticeMatters is a non-profit Christian organization that provides “legal services to the vulnerable and marginalized in North Carolina, specializing in helping immigrants and survivors of human trafficking rebuild their lives.”¹¹ While the group assists survivors who are trafficked for a host of reasons through varied means, many of their clients are victims who have been lured or coerced to enter the country, often through fraudulent means. JusticeMatters executive director Libby Magee Coles points out that their clients who have survived

On Eagles Wings

www.oneagleswingsministries.org



Anchor House

www.restoreonelife.org



Justice Matters

www.justicemattersnc.org



sex trafficking are “from all over the world,” with a majority from Central and South America.¹²

The legal path for foreign national victims of human trafficking to fully escape their servitude and find safety and healing can be long and complicated. The federal government has established a temporary Visa program specifically for trafficking survivors. Coles points out that part of the purpose of this Visa program “is to support survivors who bravely choose to come forward and assist in the investigation and prosecution of their traffickers.” Communities are safer because of the valuable information survivors provide to law enforcement agencies.¹³

Eventually, victims who qualify for one of these special Visas may be able to apply for permanent residency and citizenship. JusticeMatters helps trafficking victims navigate the immigration processes, determining which legal remedies are most appropriate for each individual survivor. According to Coles, “The time it takes to obtain a Visa depends a great deal on where the client is in their healing process,” and can take anywhere from a matter of months to two years, depending on the specific client and situation.¹⁴ These immigration services are coupled with efforts to empower survivors to rebuild and reengage by reuniting with their families and going back to school and work. JusticeMatters helps survivors seek justice in a way that helps them progress on their path to healing and restoration.

Preventing the Unthinkable

The consensus among these ministry leaders is that human trafficking “really could affect

anyone,”¹⁵ and is already “happening right here.”¹⁶ The pervasive nature of trafficking means that parents and communities must be vigilant, especially when it comes to at-risk youth populations. Fitchpatrick and Smith, who both work primarily with domestic minors who have been trafficked, agree that the key to prevention is “Parents. Parents. Parents.”¹⁷ Because of the naïveté of youth who are targeted for trafficking, Fitchpatrick says, “Parents need to wake up ... and be aware of who their children are talking to on social media [where pimps recruit].”¹⁸ Coles believes that the biggest difference would be made “if we took all the gifts God has given us and invested them in our communities in ways that don’t seem particularly exciting or glamorous,” like “mentoring kids from broken homes, tutoring, adopting, taking in foster kids, and truly binding up the brokenness in the world, loving the vulnerable in our midst.”¹⁹ Smith points out that, “When the kids feel healthy and supported, they’re not generally going to be at risk to be trafficked.”²⁰

Certainly, the staff and volunteers at On Eagles Wings, Restore One, and JusticeMatters represent hundreds, if not thousands, of North Carolinians who are heeding Coles’ call “to love our neighbors in word and deed,” by reaching out and helping trauma survivors among us to their feet as they build a new life in the light and out of the ashes of slavery’s darkness.²¹ 🏠

Brittany Farrell is assistant director of policy for the North Carolina Family Policy Council. For a footnoted version of this article, please visit www.ncfamily.org.

Endnotes

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