

▼ A Wellspring of Love

TRISH SMOUSE

The Well is a drop-in center for victims of human trafficking in Columbus, Ohio. The name comes from the account in John 4 where Jesus speaks to the woman at the well.

The Well has shown tremendous growth over the past few months since it has been housed at the East Main Corps. It is fulfilling its mission to offer a sanctuary of hope and healing to women who have been victimized by the sex industry.

Every Tuesday at The Well, trafficking survivors explode with energy laced with love. Their exhilaration is a product of finally feeling accepted and safe. Although women come from all levels of exploitation (some are currently being exploited sexually while others are leaders in the recovery movement), they connect on an extremely deep level because they all have survived the horrors of human trafficking.

Staffers provide a framework of guidance, but the survivors lead the programming as they participate in educational programs, teach others, and support one another in group therapy through intimate conversations about their emotional struggles.

We know the program is helping dozens of women because they continue to come back. This is a 100 percent volunteer program, so all the women walking through the doors come because they are receiving respect and empowerment. Participant growth has been tremendous and tangible.



Trish Smouse (right) with a client.

Success stories

“J” is a survivor we met through our street outreach program. In her first visit, she broke down. Her tears seemed to represent decades of suppressed pain. Four other survivors embraced her through her breakdown. Since that day, J has attended regularly. She recently announced that she has passed her GED assessment. In her late 40s, J held back tears as she announced to the group that she will finally start school again.

We also met “C” through our street outreach. She is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence, and human sex trafficking. While she was on the streets one lonely afternoon, an anti-human trafficking staffer invited her to The Well. C returned almost every week and said in group therapy that, due to the support she received from The Well, she had stopped using crack cocaine. C, who had used her money to get high,

now takes the \$10 she earns through the Leadership Institute participation and uses it to purchase items needed to make her apartment a home.

“M,” who comes to The Well weekly, keeps to herself but always looks forward to the coffee. She is currently homeless and says she has to engage in “survival sex” to meet her daily needs. However, each week, you can see her grow spiritually through

her steady interaction with others and changes in her “fashion statement.”

In the beginning, she would arrive wearing short skirts, spaghetti strap tops, and long-haired wigs. Now, she dresses modestly and her own hair is styled nicely. M says she does this because of a newfound freedom to be herself at The Well, rather than to play her street role. M also says that people at The Well are the only people to whom she can tell the truth.

Today, M is staying at the home of another participant who is supporting her while she gains sobriety and independence.

—Christina Conrad and Michelle Hannan also contributed to this article. Trish Smouse is the program director for the Central Ohio Rescue and Restore Coalition, an anti-human trafficking initiative coordinated by the SWONEKY Division. Christina Conrad is a clinical specialist. Michelle Hannan is director of professional and community services in Central Ohio.



Christina Conrad (left) with caseworkers and a client.

Getting Women Off the Streets

ROBERT MITCHELL

Do you think that small U.S. cities such as Cincinnati and Portland, Maine, are directly in the path of human sex trafficking? If you said yes, you're right.

"Human trafficking exists in every state and nearly every city here in the United States," writes Nita Belles author of *In Our Backyard: A Christian Perspective on Human Trafficking in the United States*.

"Look hard enough and you'll even find [trafficking] in our nation's small towns and countryside," wrote Belles, who worked with The Salvation Army in New Jersey to rescue victims trafficked during the weeks preceding the recent Super Bowl.

Army officials in Cincinnati and Portland have set up "drop-in" centers where women can find an alternative to the streets and enjoy genuine support and acceptance.

Major Patricia LaBossiere, director of women's ministries for the Northern New England Division, says the Portland Corps, which has been doing a street outreach ministry for the past year, recently opened a weekly drop-in center for women who have been or are currently being trafficked.

"It is a place where they find a warm welcome, coffee, and conversation," she says.

Activities are offered, such as crafts, cooking and life-skills classes.

"When we're out on the street meeting women, we just try to greet them, give them a little gift, and tell them that God loves them," LaBossiere says. "We also ask if they want us to pray for them."

The Salvation Army in Portland works with a local anti-trafficking coalition and tries to connect the women to social services and other forms of help, LaBossiere says.

Michelle Hannan, director of professional and community services for The Salvation Army of Central Ohio, said a drop-in center recently opened at the Cincinnati Citadel Corps.

The center is usually open the day after Salvation Army staffers conduct street outreach. They give each woman a gift bag that includes food and personal items.

"Hopefully, week after week, we'll build relationships that will help women find a way out of the sex trafficking," Hannan says.

SAVN.TV producing documentary on human trafficking

The Salvation Army Vision Network (SAVN.TV) is producing a feature documentary aimed at uncovering the connection between pornography and sexual trafficking.

SAVN.TV, a product of the USA Western Territory, says the documentary will uncover the myth that pornography is a "harmless pastime for consenting adults."

"It pulls back the curtain to reveal the ugly reality of addiction, infidelity, prostitution, child abuse, rape, and human sexual trafficking," the website says.

See the trailer at www.savn.tv/campaign/view/1039



LaBossiere said a major problem in combating human trafficking is the lack of safe, transitional housing.

Major Faith Miller, program secretary in the SWONEKY Division, says Salvation Army staffers sometimes go with police on "busts." The human trafficking victims are then given temporary hotel accommodations. Miller says she is working on a better solution.

"One of our visions is to have a residential treatment center that The Salvation Army operates," Miller says. "It's in the works."

Hannan says she is driven to help the victims of human trafficking by her "concern for social justice" and that she is thrilled to be doing it for the Army.

"The Salvation Army is willing to go into those places where other people won't go and to build relationships and to bring light into those areas," she says. "That's been a real driving force for me."



The SWONEKY Division recently received funding from the State of Ohio to fight human trafficking.

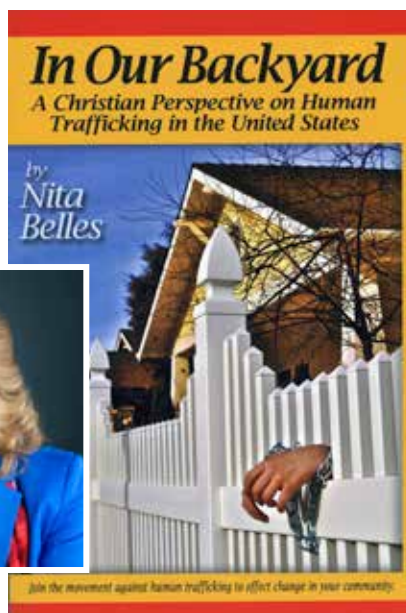
▼ Traffickers 'blitzed' During Super Bowl

ROBERT MITCHELL

In the days leading up to the Super Bowl at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., The Salvation Army and other organizations were poised to recover people being trafficked by the sex industry.

Nita Belles, a noted author, speaker, and leader of a coalition of non-profits called "Blitz The Traffickers," said the Eastern Territory helped connect her with the community, offered facilities for meetings, and printed 5,000 booklets featuring the photos of missing children believed to be the victims of trafficking.

"At least one child out of the book was recovered who was being trafficked," Belles said the day after the Super Bowl. "I don't know how many more."



"We don't have an exact number of recoveries, but our attitude is that one person being trafficked is too many, Belles said. "If we are able to recover one victim, that is worth all our efforts. We had a successful operation."

Lt. Colonel Carole Bate, the Eastern Territory's social justice consultant, said volunteers from the Southern New England and New Jersey divisions helped to distribute the booklets.

"That's what they use as a starting point to talk to people on the streets," Bate said.

Bate said that Army Founder William Booth's famous declaration "While Women Weep, I'll fight!" puts combating human trafficking "at the very core of the Salvation Army's message."

▼ Warrior Against Human Trafficking

ROBERT MITCHELL



The more Major Faith Miller learned about the subject of sexual trafficking as she wrote her master's thesis, the more she wanted to be involved in stopping it.

"You always think about human trafficking being something that happens in other countries," she says. "I didn't realize how much it takes place right here in our own communities."

"It became a passion of mine that, in my ministry, wherever I go, I want to do something as a Salva-

tion Army officer to help combat trafficking."

When Miller became program secretary in the SWONEKY Division, she saw the problem in Columbus and in Cincinnati. She helped obtain funding needed to start an anti-human trafficking campaign and allowed many talented staffers to participate.

"It's a combined effort of many people coming together to make this program successful," Miller says.

While some people are more comfortable working in the

streets or at the drop-in center, Miller's roles are to acquire the needed funding and to be a passionate advocate for the cause.

"I've seen how the Lord has blessed a vision and how He continues to make paths available for us," she says. "It's a tremendous blessing to me, even as I sit in the background."

"These women and their children need someone to be their advocate and their voice. It's important to be their support and their encouragement and to help them see the identity they have in Christ."

Miller says the victims of human trafficking have had their spiritual identities "stolen."

"I know my identity is in Christ," she says. "What drives my passion is that I want [these victims] to see their identity and their worth in Jesus. Hopefully, through our services and programs, they will be brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ."

Miller says Salvation Army staffers share both the Bible and their testimonies.

"Many of us come from broken backgrounds and perhaps have had our identities or our spirits crushed," she says. "We share our testimonies and where we are now. It's nothing we've done ourselves, but it's all through a personal relationship with Christ."

"We can restore our identity and worth and know that we are loved and cared for by Christ. We use God's Word to point them to a relationship with Him. That's what helps to make them whole."

"It's not about what's happened to them, it's about who they can be now in Christ."