

Safe-house an open door to combat human trafficking

The Salvation Army is continuing its effort to end modern-day slavery as it expands the services of its safe-house in Sydney and, as **SIMONE WORTHING** reveals, raise awareness of the issue globally

The wretched business of slavery has reinvented itself through practices that many of us thought were abolished long ago.

According to the United Nations, \$US31.6 billion of profit is extracted from 12.3 million people in forced labour every year. Approximately two million of these people are the victims of human trafficking, with 80 per cent of them being women and children.

The UN reports that people are trafficked from 127 countries and are exploited in 137 nations around the world, including Australia.

People are trafficked here for the purpose of forced labour, slavery, and sexual servitude. Many are in debt bondage – forced to pay off debts their employers say they owe. These types of abuses can occur in workplaces, in private homes and through marriage.

The Salvation Army is a key international player in the global movement against slavery as it cares for victims, advocates for policy reform and raises awareness of how local communities can join the effort.

In Sydney, The Salvation Army's Safe-House for Trafficked Women opened its doors at the beginning of 2008 as a 10-bed refuge where victims could receive the support and services they needed to pursue their human rights. Since then, the service has expanded to include a growing number of non-residential clients – men, women and young people who are supported as they rebuild their lives.

Jenny Stanger is the Supervisor of the safe-house. She explains that clients have complex legal and social needs throughout this process.

"Salvos Legal [a free legal service for people who cannot afford to pay] is our main partner and offers a comprehensive legal service that complements our social service," Jenny says.

"This includes criminal, migration and family matters that may need to be dealt with both in Australia and the client's home country. If we can succeed for clients legally, including getting victim compensation, back wages or other civil remedies, it can give them a good footing for the future."

Jenny believes that slavery in Australia

is more common than most people could imagine and is something that can happen to anyone who is vulnerable. She cites a case currently before the NSW courts alleging that an Anglo-Australian couple enslaved and assaulted two Anglo-Australian adults, a male and a female, in their home as domestic workers.

"We should be taking the broadest view possible so that our response catches people who would otherwise fall through the cracks," Jenny says.

"It's about reducing people's vulnerabilities and ensuring their basic human rights are protected."

Agriculture, construction, hospitality, mining, maritime services, manufacturing, health care, restaurants, domestic services, sex services, forced and slave-like marriages are just some of the contexts where serious exploitation has been uncovered.

Community support

The Salvation Army Safe-House is almost entirely funded by the Red Shield Appeal. The safe-house also receives critical donations and assistance from individuals and community groups.

The Zonta District 24 is sponsoring mental health needs of clients, the Rotary Club of Campsie has constructed a beautiful roof-top garden at the safe-house, and other clubs have donated quality clothing. Individuals have also donated goods in-kind and raised money through community events.

Jenny emphasises the need for cash donations and gift cards so clients can choose and purchase items for themselves, as well as for the safe-house.

"It's really about the community stepping up and taking action to help," she explains. "Ultimately, I'd like for community members and companies to sponsor each of our 10 rooms on an annual basis."

Dedicated volunteers have mentored clients, and provided job-seeking assistance and avenues for skills development and socialising (see volunteer comments). This support is critical for the clients of the service. The vast majority of them just want safety and acceptance in the community and the opportunity to contribute to society.



Jenny Stanger with an artwork - a bird breaking free from its cage - created by a client at The Salvation Army's safe-house in Sydney. The work depicts the "freedom" people feel when the chains of human trafficking are broken. Photo: Shairon Paterson

"Practically speaking, our clients are all super-motivated to work," Jenny says. "If you own a business and employ people, contact us and see if we have someone who would meet your needs."

"Sponsor education or apprenticeships for our clients, give them work experience or become a mentor for them. They just want what we all want; an opportunity to take care of their families."

The safe-house staff also work with The Salvation Army in the countries of origin of their clients. "There may be safety issues for the families left behind, with traffickers or agents returning and making threats," Jenny explains.

"So we tap into the strength of The

Salvation Army worldwide to help client families stay safe and well. That is part of being holistic in our view of the person we are working with. Our work has always been simultaneously local, national and international."

It is easy for the average person to feel overwhelmed by the breadth and complexity of the millions of people caught up in the web of slavery and human trafficking around the world today.

"Twelve million people [in forced labour] and \$30 billion [profits from slavery] are minuscule numbers relative to the global population and the global economy," Jenny says.

"We know much more now than we

did when I started this journey 13 years ago. I don't let the statistics deter me. I'm just going to keep on working."

Editor's note: For a profile on Jenny, more about The Salvation Army's work in human trafficking and contact information, see this month's *Women In Touch*, pages 16-17.



Simone Worthing is a staff writer for *Pipeline* and supplements.

What the volunteers say ...

Lesley - "It has been a great privilege to work with the women that come to Samaritan House, whether it is to teach them a craft or just to chat. I am inspired by their enthusiasm, creativity and tenacity in a time when they are experiencing such upheaval and uncertainty. My hope is that we can carry on working with them as they find their independence and regain their self-esteem. To help us do this you can donate any unused craft items – we will make use of them! Or you could send a gift card from Spotlight or Lincraft and we can purchase on your behalf."

Jo - "I was looking for a way to use my design skills to help people in our community. Creativity can be so rewarding for those experiencing difficult circumstances as it gives them a sense of achievement in a very tangible way. The women have been able to make jewellery, soft furnishings and knits for themselves, thanks to donations. It is a warm and friendly environment where they can work on a project or just come for a chat. It is wonderful for us to see them work through all the stages in the refuge to become fully independent members of our community."

Dianne - "Through Jenny, residents who expressed an interest in a career in nursing were linked to me with their consent. This offered me a vehicle to use my expertise and time to support them in this process. As I am a long-term senior nursing academic in the Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health at University of Technology, Sydney, currently sloping towards retirement, it seemed a good match. We meet sporadically for an hour or so according to the schedules of both of us. Often it is weekly. The activities and discussions are tailored according to the individual's needs and interests. Clearly the carefully thought-out efforts to provide the support services these women need is critical to their successful adjustment and transition into a satisfying and productive life."