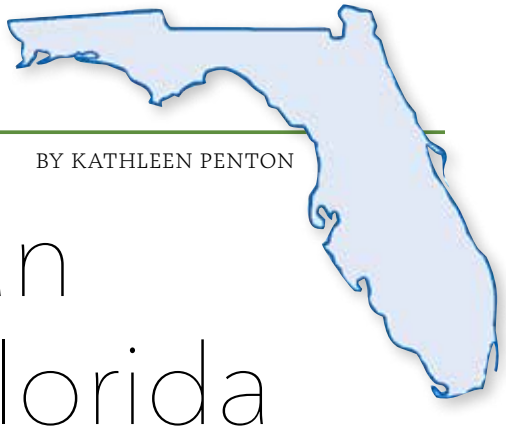

BY KATHLEEN PENTON

Combating Human Exploitation in Florida

"I AM SO EXCITED I could just bust." That's how Becky Howell, coleader of the women's ministry at Seminole Heights Baptist Church in Tampa, Florida, started an email to Carol Clark, WMU® director for Tampa Bay Baptist Association. And Howell isn't the only one excited by the opportunity to minister to victims of human exploitation, the focus of national WMU's Project HELP℠.

The SonShine missions conference, sponsored by the Florida Baptist Convention, in April 2012 sparked the involvement of the women of Seminole Heights Baptist. Attendees were encouraged to participate in one of several ministry opportunities. The Seminole Heights women chose to provide backpacks with toiletry items and stuffed animals for women rescued from human trafficking. But they didn't just buy backpacks and the supplies to fill them.



One woman, Delilah Libby—a seamstress/crafts expert, found a simple way to make backpacks from T-shirts and cord. So church members donated T-shirts, and 13 women brought their portable sewing machines to the church for a soup, sandwich, and sewing gathering to make as many backpacks as they could to deliver to the missions conference.

"We started at 10 A.M. and were supposed to end at 1 P.M., but they were so excited that we decided to continue until about 4:30 P.M., stopping briefly to grab a sandwich and a cup of soup and then back to work. We cut, pinned, and stamped designs with paint and then sewed, ironed, and folded until we were run out by the janitorial staff," Howell said. "It was such a success we decided this is something we want to do quarterly."

The women's passion for the ministry helped them collect items to fill the backpacks, which were sent to a shelter in southwest Florida. One woman collected about 50 stuffed dogs from her co-workers. Another woman told her co-workers about the ministry, and someone donated a case of deodorant. Yet another shared with a Target store manager and walked away with items like toothpaste, mouthwash, and soap.

For printable directions for making the backpacks, visit wmu.com/adults/projects.

At the conference, many women helped stuff the 80 backpacks in a breakout session, and Howell said a couple of groups asked how to make them. Of course, Seminole Heights' women are still making the backpacks and finding new uses for them.

Clark believes others caught the vision for human exploitation ministry, too.

"The women were enthusiastic, and I am certain that there were [women] who returned to their churches around the state with plans to multiply efforts to minister to those who are exploited," she said. □

How can you help your church catch the vision for ministering to victims of human exploitation?

Your gifts to the Vision Fund support WMU's Project HELP ministry to combat human trafficking. Send your gifts to

Vision Fund
WMU Foundation
100 Missionary Ridge
Birmingham, AL 35242

BY KATHLEEN PENTON



Combating Human Exploitation in Mississippi

When we see a pink ribbon, we think of breast cancer. Taylor Townsend hopes that soon, when we see a blue heart, we think of human trafficking.

As a 2011 National Acteens® Panelist, Townsend assisted the leadership of Blume℠, a missions event for teen girls and collegiate young women, in July. Some of its conferences and hands-on ministry projects focused on human exploitation—the focus of national WMU's Project HELP℠—and that got Townsend thinking about how she spent her time and where she invested her energy. She decided to devote her time and energy to developing a Blue Heart Campaign in her home state of Mississippi. The campaign is an initiative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to fight human trafficking and its impact on society.



"This is a state, national, and international problem that is so complicated and immense most people shrink back from getting involved," said Townsend, a premed biology student at Mississippi College. But "we cannot shrink back. We must boldly face this issue and do our part to alleviate this tragedy."

For her part, Townsend believes she can be a voice for those who have no voice. In March 2012, she met with Governor Phil Bryant and others to launch the campaign, challenging all Mississippians to be aware, share, and care. Her Web site, AwareShareCare.org, defines being aware as knowing the signs to look for in women and children being trafficked, sharing as presenting a human trafficking awareness program in a school or a church or distributing information or blue heart stickers, and caring as reporting human trafficking to legal authorities or calling the National Human Trafficking Resource Center hotline at 1-888-3737-888.

In addition, she is leading a Facebook campaign; has raised funds to support the creation of human trafficking awareness stickers; is developing a human trafficking awareness presentation for schools, community organizations, churches, and service clubs; is promoting state legislation to aid in human trafficking prevention; is encouraging legislative committee chairs to support pending laws to punish human trafficking offenders; and has written articles promoting human trafficking awareness for *The MAG*, Acteens' magazine.

Townsend's efforts have led to the governor endorsing her as a spokeswoman for human trafficking awareness in Mississippi, Congressman Gregg Harper recognizing her on the floor of the United States House of Representatives, and Mississippi Attorney General Jim Hood asking her to speak at the 2012 Spring Prosecutors Conference in Biloxi. But her ultimate goal reaches beyond gaining glory for herself—she wants to make a difference in the lives of women and children being trafficked, one person at a time. □

How do you plan to be aware of, share, and care about human exploitation?

Source: Taylor Townsend

Here are some things you can do in your state:

1. Research human trafficking in your state. Start by visiting PolarisProject.org for information on how your state rates on human trafficking laws.
2. Write your legislators to ask them to pass laws to alleviate human trafficking.
3. Schedule appointments with state officials to ask for their help.
4. Create a promotional campaign for your church for a Blue Heart Awareness Day. Visit unodc.org/BlueHeart for more information and campaign tools.
5. Speak in churches and schools and to organizations to raise awareness of what is going on behind closed doors in your state.
6. Pray for wisdom and for God to work His way in and through your efforts, and expect miracles in His name!

BY KATHLEEN PENTON



Combating Human Exploitation in California

Eva De La Rosa was reading *Not for Sale* when she came across a familiar name—El Monte. "That's where I live!" she thought.

The book about human trafficking and a 2009 conference on the issue opened the eyes of California WMU®'s executive director. She started wondering what went on in that building across the street from her church, the one surrounded by a fence with sharp ends pointing inward. De La Rosa asked a pastor about it, and he said the owner bought and sold cars. Maybe if he only deals in white vans with no windows, she mused.

Now, De La Rosa is always looking at that building and others with fences seemingly designed to keep people in instead of out to see who comes and goes and if anything looks different.

"The more I learn about human trafficking, the more I learn about how people are pulled into it, the more passionate I become about other people knowing about it," De La Rosa says.

That's good because California is the top potential trafficking location in the United States, according to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center's 2011 Annual Report. So California WMU is not only educating people about the issue but also challenging people to find ways their church or association can make a difference.

At the 2011 California WMU annual meeting, a breakout session provided an overview of the six issues of human exploitation, as defined by national WMU's Project HELP℠, with a focus on the biggest issues in California—labor and sex trafficking. Few women were aware trafficking even existed in the US, let alone in their state. De La Rosa said they were alarmed but inspired to learn more and share with their church families.



California WMU uses interactive sessions to raise awareness of human exploitation in its state.

Human exploitation was an emphasis of California WMU's first collegiate young women's event in February 2012. The young women got to walk in the shoes of young women from Moldova, experiencing the choices and consequences of human trafficking through an interactive simulation based on the CD *Trafficked!* (available from wmustore.com). According to De La Rosa, it was well received by the young women who are very interested in and knowledgeable about social issues like exploitation.

> Deborah Davis, California WMU's team leader for family and community issues, helped address human exploitation by advocating for Proposition 35 to be on the November 2012 ballot in California. The initiative to increase prison sentences and fines for human traffickers passed with 81 percent of the vote.

In May 2012, De La Rosa set up an interactive display at the annual Ministers' Wives Retreat, sponsored by the California Southern Baptist Convention's healthy church group. While the women were very disturbed by the information, they felt the ideas De La Rosa provided about how churches could be involved were very needed, so she was invited to host a workshop at this year's retreat. In keeping with the nautical theme, she's planning to focus on ports like San Francisco and Long Beach, which can be points of entry and exit for human trafficking.

"I've tried to keep this in the forefront as something that we need to help address," De La Rosa says, noting she and her all-volunteer staff want every event they do to have a workshop or display on human exploitation to raise awareness and highlight available resources. "The biggest action I want to convey . . . is that [we] can help [people] become more and more aware, because the more it's out in the light, [the more] people can see things." □

How do you plan to help address human exploitation in your state?

BY KATHLEEN PENTON



Combating Human Exploitation in Utah

She found herself at the police station with the victim's advocate, discussing where she and her twin boys would go. The advocate began telling her about an organization that helped women in her exact dangerous and desperate situation. Still she was hesitant about letting anyone help her. But with hope that there really were people who loved unconditionally and wanted to help, she went to a home with nothing but an overnight bag and three broken, scared hearts.

Now, with her own place, a job, and educational opportunities for herself and her sons, she says, "We are all three very healthy emotionally and physically and living an extremely happy, fulfilling, and flourishing life I had never imagined living before leaving my situation. We could have never done this without HELP."

Holding Out HELP (Helping, Encouraging, and Loving Polygamists) is committed to helping women and children discover freedom from polygamy—a form of human exploitation, the focus of national WMU's Project HELP℠. In some polygamous communities, girls are born and raised to be mothers and receive little to no education. They might be married as young as 12 to men as old as 60 and have more than 15 children.

The Draper, Utah-based organization got its start in 2008, when, at a friend's request, founder/director Tonia Tewell and her family opened their home's basement to a family of six who were fleeing polygamy.

"They . . . stayed throughout the summer months. I watched a terrified family become strong and confident with the many hands from our community surrounding and encouraging them," Tewell says.

When the family was getting ready to transition to its own home, it asked her to start an organization so that others might receive unconditional love. So she set out on a four-month fact-finding mission and quickly determined there were many needs.

"The number one thing we realized was that due to the religious abuse most had come from, the unconditional love and nonjudgmental approach was the only thing that would truly make a difference," Tewell says.

HOLDING OUT HELP
Helping, Encouraging & Loving Polygamists

Based on Matthew 25:35–40, Holding Out HELP partners with other nonprofits, state agencies, and individuals to provide housing, food, clothing, education, job training, counseling, and referral services. It encourages victims to reach for help through its hotline, 1-866-517-3632, and Web site, HoldingOutHelp.org.

Women often leave their communities with the clothes on their backs and an idea that they are condemned to hell for not believing their leaders and pleasing their husbands. Tewell says most suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder because they have left everyone and everything they know and have no idea how the "evil" outside world works. "It takes them years of rehabilitation to become independent and self-sufficient," she adds.

Thus far, the organization has served more than 450 people directly and another 500 indirectly. □

How do you plan to offer help and unconditional love to human exploitation victims?

Polygamy is illegal in the United States. However, Brigham Young University researchers estimate that 30,000 to 50,000 people live a polygamist lifestyle. Many live in Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and Texas in sects that splintered from the Mormon church after it renounced polygamy in 1890. Those sects believe Joseph Smith, the church's founder, received a revelation that men should have as many wives and children as possible to replenish the earth and celestial afterlife.

An estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Muslims live in polygamous families. The Prophet Muhammad had multiple wives, and the Koran allows men up to four wives but says they must not favor one woman over another financially or emotionally.

Project HELP is supported in part by a grant from the Vision Fund. Your gift of $34 will provide for one hour of WMU ministry.

Vision Fund
c/o WMU Foundation
100 Missionary Ridge
Birmingham, AL 35242

BY KATHLEEN PENTON



Combating Human Exploitation in Illinois

Children playing outside an elementary school. Women working inside a strip club. A large group of migrant workers living in one house. What do they all have in common?

"You could see exploitation indicators all around," Judy Halter says. But only if you know what to look for.

Halter, the Acteens® leader at Anna Heights Baptist Church in Anna, Illinois, has made sure her girls know, and they have made sure their friends and others know. Their journey started with an idea in the September/October 2011 issue of *The Mag*.

The Acteens' magazine suggested hosting a "pedicure party" where participants paint toenails bright red and place a traffic light decal representing the red-light district on one toe as a reminder to pray for the millions of women and children exploited by the sex industry worldwide. But Halter and her Acteens decided to do something more permanent. Using red, yellow, and green glass beads, they made approximately 70 prayer bracelets that look like traffic lights and attached a card with human trafficking statistics and prayers corresponding to each colored bead. The beads encouraged daily prayer for sex workers to stop the lives they are living, yield to God, and go forward on His path for their lives. The Acteens added a clear bead beneath the "traffic light" to signify a clean new start in life. They gave the bracelets to friends and anyone else interested in helping stop human trafficking—one issue national WMU® is focusing on through Project HELP℠: Human Exploitation.



But they didn't stop there. They made kits with the necessary supplies to take to the state Acteen conference in November 2011 so all the Acteens present could make a bracelet to keep and one to give to a friend. Together, they made about 140 more bracelets.

Each year, the state's Acteens help with crafts, recreation, and worship at Girls in Action® camp, so at the June 2012 camp, the Anna Heights Baptist Acteens led the approximately 120 GA®s to make bracelets as one of their crafts.

Also last summer, the Anna Heights Acteens took the traffic light idea to a Cobden, Illinois, migrant camp. They helped the younger children make foam traffic lights. The accompanying card was translated into Spanish so the children could share the dangers of exploitation with their families.

"Educating the Acteen age-level girls in missions has been one of the greatest experiences of my life," says Halter, who also serves as the youth chairman for Illinois WMU. "Seeing them take off with their own creative ideas to help teach others about serving God and changing their world has kept me inspired and energized."

Serena Butler, former executive director of Illinois WMU, has noticed. "I know [making the bracelets] has made a huge difference in Judy's life, because every time we are planning a WMU gathering, she asks what we will be doing to keep the human trafficking issue in front of our folks." □

Trafficking Signs

- High security measures in work and/or living location (e.g., opaque windows, boarded up windows, bars on windows, barbed wire, security cameras)
- Few or no personal possessions
- Not allowed or able to speak (a third party may insist on being present or translating)
- Fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or paranoid (especially after bringing up law enforcement)
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Lack of health care
- Malnourished appearance
- Signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture

For more potential human trafficking indicators, visit **Polaris-Project.org/human-trafficking/recognizing-the-signs**.

How do you plan to help others learn to see the signs of human exploitation in your community?

Project HELP: Human Exploitation is supported in part by a grant from the Vision Fund held at the WMU Foundation.

BY KATHLEEN PENTON



Combating Human Exploitation in Mississippi

Look beneath the surface of the Gulf of Mexico, and you might see red snappers, oysters, and sea turtles being hidden, cradled, and housed in deepwater coral reefs and nonproducing oil platforms. Look beneath the surface of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and you might see men, women, and children being exploited, sold, and enslaved in the sex entertainment industry and forced labor.

Advocates for Freedom (AFF) wants to open people's eyes to human trafficking so they can help stop it in Biloxi, Mississippi, and beyond.

Susie Harvill's eyes were literally opened to this issue by God. She asked Him what He wanted her to do with the last years of her life. After three years of waking up every day at 3 A.M., Harvill finally saw His answer: human trafficking.

Even though human trafficking is the second largest and fastest growing criminal industry in the world, she knew little about it. But God immediately sent others to teach her about what trafficking victims go through and ways to help.

"We at Advocates for Freedom are . . . now the ones training others," Harvill said of the faith-based nonprofit organization she founded in 2010. "Together, with God, we are taking down this mountain of harm that hurts and changes our children and young adults."

AFF focuses on meeting victims' needs for shelter and protection first. It works with the law enforcement, business, government, education, medical, media/arts, nonprofit, and faith communities, among others, to provide hope and healing. Victims often suffer from post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression. They are frequently malnourished and in need of medical treatment for various diseases.

Thus far, the organization has helped 92 victims. "The people of Mississippi are our partners and have been the ones to help find victims," Harvill said. "After the shock of realizing human trafficking is in every community in our state, most want something to do to stop this, so we put them to work."

Like national WMU's Project HELP℠: Human Exploitation, AFF encourages people to pray; look for trafficking indicators (working excessively long and/or unusual hours, avoiding eye contact, lacking knowledge of whereabouts, etc.) and report them; talk with family, friends, and co-workers; and use their skills such as counseling, teaching, and cooking. People can also participate in AFF events like the Stiletto Walk held last September in Biloxi and host Recycle 2 Restore parties (see sidebar above).

For more information, visit AdvocatesForFreedom.org. □



Victims of trafficking see themselves as used, tattered, and abused. Recycle 2 Restore transforms materials described in the same way to help these women see themselves as valuable, purposeful, and beautiful.

Trash to Treasure

Used. Tattered. Torn. Worthless. These words could describe T-shirts, magazines, or even people. Just as Advocates for Freedom (AFF) takes human trafficking victims and gives them purpose, Recycle 2 Restore (R2R) takes old T-shirts and magazines and gives them new life as bracelets, necklaces, scarves, belts, bags, dog toys, and more.

"We are transforming [what] would typically be thrown out for trash, ignored in the closet, and basically viewed as junk . . . into something beautiful, purposeful, and valuable," Abby Birkey, AFF's missionary project specialist, said of the fund-raising project that started in the fall of 2012.

R2R items are sold at AFF events and speaking engagements and through parties hosted in homes, churches, schools, and other venues. Parties are also held to make items.

For more information, visit Recycle2Restore.wix.com/Recycle-2-Restore.

How do you plan to help look for a solution to human trafficking?