

The STOP Light

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In 2002 our organization changed its name to ADULTS SAVING KIDS. Prior to that we were called A-STOP (Alliance for Speaking Truths On Prostitution), STOP (Speaking Truths on Prostitution), or Grassroots Ministry Alliance.

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Prevention begins with you and me

For the past eleven years, I have been working to help people who feel helpless, oppressed, and powerless over their lives. They speak of feeling violated to the core of their being, their soul. The people I work with are survivors of sexual violence. Over the years, I have come in contact with many people who were victimized by a form of sexual violence—prostitution. Each survivor has a unique life story about how they became involved in the sex industry (prostitution, stripping, pornography), how they survived, how they got out (if they are out), and how their lives have been affected.

My work is not in a large metropolitan area. It is in the heart of rural Minnesota. Our young people are vulnerable to those who would exploit them for promises of jobs, love, or money. They are vulnerable because they do not receive prevention education that warns them about pimps or predators they might meet in the places like malls, outdoor parties or motel room parties where they hang out. Parents are not prepared to talk with their children about such non-"Minnesota nice" subjects. It's hard enough to talk about healthy sexuality, let alone discuss sexual abuse or prostitution as something their kids might have to deal with.

Yet, our children are dealing with it! Maybe it begins with an acquaintance rape and the child is given money to keep quiet. They feel guilty that they have done something wrong. This may be reinforced when parents find out and shame them further by not believing them. Even when believed by parents, attitudes in our society and legal system may fail a young person who has taken money for sex. A prevailing attitude is often that a person chose or Someone's body is just another commodity to be bought and sold. The pimp and the john are just a businessman and a customer. It is illegal. It is rape. It was forced, manipulated, coerced. And the victim's life is changed forever.

Young people are especially vulnerable when their lives were conditioned in early childhood by sexual molestation. They become an easy target for those who would exploit them in the sex industry. Because a person's boundaries were broken or didn't develop, that person is vulnerable to someone else continuing to break the boundaries. A pimp can pick up on this by testing a young person to see if they can cross boundaries without getting a reaction. The pimp can figure

out whether the youth seems open to talking to a stranger or someone giving them attention. This is not the victim's fault; the victim has been conditioned to do this.

Young women are vulnerable when they have teenage pregnancies without the support of the child's father, her family, or the community. If she gets kicked out of the home, she may live with friends or move to another part of the country. Because poverty is a major dilemma for a teenager with a child to feed, she may turn to the sex industry to earn money, not as a real choice, but because of a lack of better choices.

Young people are vulnerable when they run away from home. Once on the streets, they will be approached by a pimp within days. Pimps make kids feel safe at first, taken care of and made to feel special, but it won't be a free ride. They will be forced to earn their way through pornography, stripping, and prostitution. They are dependent upon their pimps and they may be dependent on drugs used to help them numb out their feelings. They may have been threatened, beaten, and sexually abused by their pimp. They may be abused and beaten by johns. Death may be the consequence for trying to get away. They may be taken to another state and sold to another pimp. This is the slavery of today. Freeing these child slaves begins with you and me!

Where can we begin? We begin by becoming involved! We can get involved in the "Preventing Teen Exploitation" project of the Southwestern Minnesota Women of the ELCA. These women are working with ADULTS SAVING KIDS to speak to 5,000 youth in southwest Minnesota about the realities of prostitution and how youth can protect themselves. Help is needed to get a prevention message into the schools. You can talk to your school superintendent, board members, teachers, guidance counselors, and social workers. Where schools have social concern workshop days, you can help to get the issue of teen prostitution prevention included as one of the workshops. Educate yourself and become a speaker for our children and grandchildren. Contact Pastor Al Erickson at A-STOP for training opportunities.

Wherever you live, whether you are a mother, grandmother, or a concerned person, become a part of the ELCA Women working to prevent further tragedy and loss of our young people to those who exploit them. Help in the battle to rescue the 11, 12, 13, 14 year-olds who need our help. We must prevent our youth from being lured away in the future. It can happen to your child or mine, your grandchild or mine. Prevention is everybody's business!

by Ginny Larson, Coordinator of Sexual Assault Services in Brown, Nicollet, and Sibley counties in Minnesota. For further information, call 507/931-2652. Ginny is also a speaker for ADULTS SAVING KIDS.

Church women make commitment

The Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Southwestern Minnesota Synod, have made a commitment to work ADULTS SAVING KIDS in a campaign to reduce the recruitment of our young people into prostitution. The communities of southwestern Minnesota, as well as other communities throughout the United States, have the commodity necessary for the survival of the sex industry—their youth.

The element that makes young people so vulnerable to being lured into prostitution is their innocence. Pimps and procurers know that four things make young people vulnerable to suggestion and manipulation: inexperience in dealing with people, overwhelming personal problems, lack of knowledge or ability to access people who could help them, and feelings of

isolation or low self-esteem. Communities set their youth up for these four factors when they use family secrets and shame as a means of social control. This often creates an environment that encourages young people to feel their only choice for survival is to run away. We know that statistically, runaway children are the most vulnerable and most at risk of being recruited into prostitution. We also know that a large percentage of these children were sexually exploited in their own community before they left.

However, there are also families and communities that are healthy, that support the youth in their schools, churches, and homes, yet these youth are also at risk of being lured into prostitution. The sheltering of young people can create what is popularly known as "Minnesota nice." In an attempt to be kind, polite, and non-argumentative, young people can become trapped by the lies and false promises of a pimp or procurer of prostitutes. Once trapped, a young person does not want to "hurt" her or his family or community by returning and telling them the truth of what has happened to them. They feel as though they have let their families down. They are also afraid to face possible anger from their parents or the shame and embarrassment the community may impose on them. They would rather die and often do. It is unfortunate that innocence, with all its sweetness and charm, can be deadly in today's world.

This is why the Women of the ELCA in southwestern Minnesota have made a commitment to speak to 5,000 young people in our area. We want to provide youth with the tools necessary to stay out of prostitution by giving them straight talk on prostitution. We will inform them of how pimps and procurers operate. We will help them see the lies used to entice and trap them into the sex industry. We will tell them about the process of victimization and how it destroys a person's sense of self-worth and ability to say no to people who hurt them. We need to encourage personal strength and self-esteem within our youth. We also need to acknowledge that when we teach our children the Lord's prayer, the petition "deliver us from evil" is not just something to be memorized, it is a very real need.

by Theresa Duty, Community Program Specialist for Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota. Theresa is also a speaker for ADULTS SAVING KIDS.

ADULTS SAVING KIDS' approach to prevention

Since the fall of 1995, ADULTS SAVING KIDS has been working with the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America in southwestern Minnesota to prevent the exploitation of young people. The first two articles in this issue of The STOP Light were written by women involved in this project.

Our approach to prevention is unique. We seek to create a larger conversation in communities to have adults see what is going on in the lives of kids, how kids are vulnerable to exploitation, and how people can give leadership to prevent kids from being exploited. This approach has three components: commitment, project, leadership, team and training.

Commitment

ADULTS SAVING KIDS is committed to reducing commercial sexual exploitation, and to kids having great lives. We work with people who have these same commitments because it is out of these commitments that we can work together to make a difference for youth. Our commitments drive our future actions.

Project

In early 1995, ADULTS SAVING KIDS started a project called "Campaign 10,000" in which it committed to delivering a message of preventing exploitation to 10,000 Minnesota youth in 1996. As part of Campaign 10,000 and in partnership with ADULTS SAVING KIDS, the Women of the ECLA have decided to get a prevention message to 5,000 kids in southwestern Minnesota.

Leadership

ADULTS SAVING KIDS approached the synod board of Women of the ECLA, heard their commitment to youth, asked them to create a project, and then supported them in their leadership. When people saw that synod level leaders in their church were committed, they became inspired to get involved in their own communities. No one was left feeling alone with their problems, or feeling that no one cared.

Team

We believe it's important for people to feel they are not alone in their commitments and actions. Because of this, ADULTS SAVING KIDS established a network of local teams within the ECLA Women's organization. These teams look at what they can do to prevent young people in their communities from being exploited. Each team consists of five members:

Leader: Makes sure local team is in action effectively for the youth.

Discoverer: Discovers community people who are concerned about youth, are experts, or are already running prevention programs.

Pray-er: Undergirds the project with prayer.

Awareness Builder: Makes sure community and school becomes aware of the issues of commercial sexual exploitation.

Celebrator: Records and displays what team is learning and is accomplishing.

Training

ADULTS SAVING KIDS provides three types of training:

- What commercial sexual exploitation is all about and what resources are available. People need to understand the issue if they are going to take action to prevent kids from getting involved.
- How to give leadership to effectively oversee the teams and keep track of what is going on.
- How to speak about this issue to church audiences and to youth in schools.

You can do this too!

Is your group committed? Do you want to make a difference in the lives of kids? Contact Al Erickson at (612) 872-0684 to partner with ADULTS SAVING KIDS in preventing kids from being exploited in the sex industry.

A job description

Editor's note: This tongue-in-cheek piece was written by a survivor of juvenile prostitution. It is meant to be educational, giving people a warning about some of the realities of prostitution. What she has written may not be true of every person who has been in prostitution.

Help Wanted — Prostitute

Young girls wanted—ages 12-25, with physical attributes.

Job duties: to perform sexual acts - being penetrated orally, anally, and vaginally with penises, fingers, fists, and objects, including but not limited to bottles, brushes, dildos, guns and/or animals. Don't worry. Being bound and gagged, tied with ropes and/or chains, burned with cigarettes or hung from beams or trees isn't unusual.

Your manager/pimp will be violent, greedy, hateful, non-caring, controlling bastard. You can't get away from your manager so don't try it.

You have no benefits. You get to spend no money on yourself. You spread your legs all day. You don't have to spend money on clothes, and you might get bailed out of jail.

Job expenses: You pay for cabs, drugs, and your manager.

Job hazards: AIDS is a possibility. Possible body parts missing, scars, missing teeth, assaulted by customers and managers. Possible kidnapping, gang rape, getting shot, stabbed, losing hair, starved, forced into addiction. If any of the above happens, it's on you. Don't call the police, they can't help.

You will work in cheap motels, apartments, cars, parks, basements, hallways, alleys, dark places, crack houses, in a bar, upper class homes, bathrooms, anywhere possible. Does not matter as long as the job gets done.

Apply within the next 78 hours.

Warning: you probably will be tested out by manager and you will do what he wants.

Written by a survivor of juvenile prostitution. Used by permission of WHISPER. (Editor's note: WHISPER is no longer in existence as an organization.)

My human rights

My assertive human rights:

1. I have the right to have feelings and to express them. I don't have to justify them or apologize for them.
2. I have the right to judge my own behavior, thoughts, and emotions and I take responsibility for them.
3. I have the right to be treated with respect and to be listened to seriously.
4. I have the right to be imperfect. Being imperfect does not make me worthless.
 - I have the right to change my mind.
 - I have the right to say, "I don't know" and "I don't understand."
 - I have the right to make illogical decisions.
 - I have the right to make both little and big mistakes and to take responsibility for them.
 - I am unable to do everything.
 - I am unable to solve everybody's problems.
 - I can't please all people at all times.
5. I have the right to set my own priorities.
6. I have the right to say no without feeling guilty.
7. I have the right to ask for what I want
8. I have the right to get what I pay for.
9. I have the right to ask for information from professionals.
10. I have the right to choose not to assert myself. .

If you don't mind killing people...

Have you ever thought how wonderful life could be—if you don't mind killing people?

Fourteen years ago a man told me something that stuck to my ribs. He said the Bible story of King Ahab and Naboth is right on in terms of what is happening in today's society. It's a story about not minding killing people.

King Ahab wanted for himself a vineyard that belonged to Naboth. The king offered to either pay Naboth a good price for it or trade a suitable parcel of land for the vineyard. But, much to King Ahab's dismay, Naboth said, "Thanks, but no. I inherited this land from my father and ancestors, and I will keep it and pass it on to my children. I will not give it up."

King Ahab went back to the palace, dejected and miserable. He suffered because he respected Naboth's right to say no. He could not fulfill his dreams. Immediate gratification was denied him. He could have—and probably would have—gotten over it.

But Queen Jezebel noticed his misery and asked about it. He told how Naboth's refusal had crushed his dreams. She said, "No problem." Now King Ahab could have inquired what Queen Jezebel was going to do, but he really didn't want to know. What he didn't know wouldn't hurt him, right?

This dilemma was a no-brainer for Queen Jezebel. She sent a letter in the name of the king to the elders in Naboth's area. They were told to put false witnesses on the stand and get Naboth stoned to death for cursing the king and God. In short order Naboth was dead.

Jezebel then went to her husband and told him the good news that the major obstacle to his desire had been removed. The king got his vineyard and life went on. And it was all so simple!

It's amazing how easy life can be—if you don't mind killing people.

Now, many of us have some sexual wants. Not needs, but wants. People don't die from lack of sex. But these sexual wants are strong and we wish there was an easy way to satisfy them. We might want to see someone naked or have them perform some sexual act with us. But like King Ahab, we have this strange notion that we should respect their rights.

Suddenly, to our delight, we find there are sex objects provided out there. Somehow, someone has conveniently made them sexually available to us. All we have to do is pay. Like King Ahab, it appears we have easy access to what we want. These sex objects are even saying what we want to hear: "Take me and pay me and that's all there is to it." But is that all there is to it?

There are Jezebels in our society who have no qualms about saying, "No problem. You need a sexual favor. I'll find you someone." Then they simply enroll or manipulate or con or entice or drug or terrify the young person into working in the sex industry. Whether that young person loses his or her reputation, health, family, or life is of no real concern to these Jezebels. Making money is.

Like King Ahab, we know that these Jezebels are up to no good. Yet, we take the easy route and go along. We allow ourselves to be customers of the sex industry. We allow the pimps, the madams, the sauna owners, the strip club owners, the pornographers to do their thing. So what if over 600 people are murdered in prostitution every year in this country. So what if 15% of the suicides are people in prostitution. So what if thousands die from AIDS. It has nothing to do with us. We didn't kill them, right?

King Ahab could have said something. He didn't. He could have stopped Queen Jezebel. He didn't. And they both died violent deaths.

In America, where silence about exploitation of youth by the sex industry has reigned, will we be the ones like King Ahab who didn't speak or act?

It is impossible to remain neutral about commercial sexual exploitation. It is evil to remain silent about the present oppression and devastation of women, girls and boys.

God is not mocked. What we sow we shall also reap. But we don't have to remain silent. We can tell people loudly and clearly that we will not use exploited people. That sexual exploitation is not okay. That we do not want anyone to die because of what we do—or don't do. We do not have to be like King Ahab or Queen Jezebel. .

by Al Erickson, director of ADULTS SAVING KIDS