Slavery Still Exists
And it Could Be in Your Backyard

A community member’s guide to fighting human trafficking and slavery
It is hard to imagine that slavery still exists in America, but it does. The US government estimates that 14,500 – 17,500 people are brought into the US each year to be used as slaves. This is real slavery, people forced to work against their will under violence or threat of violence and are paid nothing. Like the slaves of the past, slaves in America cannot walk away. They have lost control of their lives, and they are being exploited and brutalized in terrible ways.

This booklet will help you:

- Look for and identify trafficked and enslaved people in your community.
- Know what to do if and when you find slavery.
- Understand how slavery in the US fits into the slavery that exists around the world.
- Know what you can do in your life and community to bring slavery to an end.

Community members – people like you – can help detect victims of trafficking, helping them to safety and working to see the traffickers brought to justice. YOU can make the difference between slavery and freedom for someone in your community.
“He didn’t let us make any phone calls or leave the work camp. So we realized, little by little, that we were trapped”

*Trafficking survivor, female, from Guatemala*

“We’re a Neighborhood Watch community, but we’re looking for strangers, not for people who are living here, not somebody living next door.”

*Susan Ashcroft, made first contact with a victim of slavery held in her Baltimore suburb*

**Why is there slavery in the United States?**

Trafficking victims are often tricked into slavery through promises of work. Human traffickers tend to prey on impoverished people who live in countries with little access to education, health care or jobs. When traffickers disguise themselves as legitimate recruiters or employment brokers and promise paying work, many people are willing to sign on.

Parents desperately want to work so they can feed their hungry families. Young people want to work so they can pay for their schooling or that of their younger brothers and sisters. They are tricked into believing they will be paid for their work.

The basic rule of this global traffic in slaves is that victims flow from poorer countries to richer countries. As the richest country in the world, slaves are sent to the US from many places. A recent study found the citizens of more than 35 countries enslaved in the US, with the greatest numbers coming from China, Mexico, and Viet Nam.
How can we find slaves in our communities?

Watch for the following signs of slavery. The person might be a domestic worker, work in a restaurant, on a farm, in a shop, in a factory, or as a prostitute. The worker is likely to be enslaved if he or she:

- Is working or being held against his or her will
- Is not free to change employers
- Does not control his or her earnings
- Is unable to move freely or is being watched or followed
- Is afraid to discuss him or herself in presence of others
- Has been assaulted, or threatened with assault for refusing to work
- Has been cheated into payment of debt upon arrival
- Has had his or her passport or other documents taken away

If any of these apply, the person might be a victim of modern-day slavery. Modern slavery happens where workplaces are not monitored, worker wage and safety laws are not enforced, or where the work is not legal. In America, human trafficking and forced labor have occurred most often in the following industries: 

Prostitution, Domestic service, Agriculture, Garment sweatshops, Food services, Entertainment, Factories, or Landscaping.
It's a free country

Why don't they just walk away?

There are many reasons why victims of trafficking cannot simply walk away from their exploitative situation:

**Fear** – Most victims have been coerced, threatened and abused.

**Threats to family members in home country** – Oftentimes traffickers threaten to abuse or murder family members if a victim refuses to work or attempts to run away.

**Sense of shame** – Some victims feel such an acute shame about the activities they have been forced into that they fear exposing themselves, and their secrets to anyone.

**Sense of obligation** – Some victims feel obligated to pay off their “debt”, even though the “debt” is bogus and illegal.

**Sense of loyalty to the abuser** – This may take place as a result of brainwashing or traumatic bonding. Some victims are made to feel that they themselves have done something wrong, and that the trafficker deserves to punish them.

**Language and social barriers** – Extremely limited contact with the outside world leaves many victims isolated and many times without any understanding of the language or their location.

**Fear of police and immigration officials** – Police corruption experienced in the victim’s home country is often exploited by traffickers who terrify their victims with stories of what the police in the US may do to them.

The following pages tell true stories of what happens when community members find slaves.

“They told us if we tried to escape they would really hurt us. So we were afraid, if we escaped they would catch us and beat us. Or kill us. Or abandon us in the middle of nowhere where no one would ever find us.”

*Trafficking survivor, male, from Mexico*
For over five years, Louis Etongwe, a telephone worker in Virginia, has been an outstanding anti-slavery worker. Louis first learned about slavery in his community when a young woman appeared at his cousin’s house for Thanksgiving. When Louis found out that the girl had run away from a situation of domestic enslavement nearby, he felt compelled to help. Needless to say, this decision was a difficult one as it placed him at odds with members of his own Cameroonian community. This did not stop Louis and his wife. Knowing there was nowhere else she could go, they offered shelter to the young girl, believing that, “When you sow a good seed, it has a multiplying effect (and) that is the most important thing.”

Sure enough, he soon learned that several other young women were also being held as slaves. Traffickers were tricking young Cameroonian girls into thinking that domestic work opportunities with families in the US would offer them access to an education and better life. Instead, these young women became slaves, forced to work long hours performing excruciating work with no chance for education and often no money. After establishing covert communication with these victims of slavery, Louis arranged for their escape. He arranged to meet several girls at a specific location while another waited for her master to leave so that she could run out of the house and into Louis’s waiting car. Louis and his family provided room and board to these girls and helped them in bringing the traffickers to justice.

Louis recently flew to Cameroon where he visited the rescued girls’ home village and brought videotaped messages that the girls recorded for their parents. Louis says that when he played the video for the girls’ parents:

“They were so surprised — The mother was in sack-cloth mourning dress; the traffickers had told the family the children had died. That moment was the first time it ever dawned on me that I was making a difference to a lot of people.”

With videotaped testimony from both the girls and their parents, the Maryland Attorney General has now begun prosecuting the traffickers in these cases. Louis continues to help investigate these cases and others and takes time off from his regular job to help victims of trafficking and abuse. Louis’s work has been difficult and dangerous, but fulfilling.

“I’ve never felt so excited in my life to be doing what I’m doing,” Louis says.

Thankfully, now community members who want to help victims of trafficking do not have to go it alone. They can join forces with the many local organizations across the United States that have begun working together to rescue victims, find them safe places to stay and empower them to rebuild their lives.

Louis is quick to point out that even the smallest action can make a big difference. He urges everyone, no matter where they live in the United States, to take the first step in fighting slavery in our communities.

“Know your neighbors, ask them questions.”

Louis Etongwe
Slavery in a Church?

The last place Deetz and Sandy Shepherd expected to meet an enslaved person was in church. What they learned shocked their entire community and led the Shepherd family to become part of the modern-day Underground Railroad to help save a boy named Given.

The Shepherds were happy to offer their home to a traveling boys’ choir that was singing at churches in their community. Given and the other choir boys were from shantytowns in Zambia, and were brought to the US by an American man who promised payment and an education. The boys were even promised that the money they raised at churches would be donated to their home communities in Zambia in order to build sorely needed schools.

In reality, Given and his friends were being exploited. Neither he nor any of his choir-mates received any payment for their work. No schooling was provided. It seemed that all the boys did was sing, sing, sing. And sing they did, sometimes performing as many as eight concerts in a single day to well-intentioned audiences in churches, schools, and malls, who believed that their financial contributions were providing the boys with schooling, housing and a salary. If any of the boys asked for their pay, they were told that they would be paid in one lump sum at the end of their tour. If they asked more questions, or insisted on being paid, they were threatened with deportation back to Zambia. This threat was very real to Given and the other boys.

The Shepherds weren’t the only ones to notice that something wasn’t quite right about the choir. Soon federal authorities had enough information to build a case against the traffickers and the boys were placed in the homes of compassionate community members.

Given
now enjoys a safe and productive life with the Shepherds.
What is the US government doing?

Human trafficking has been a FEDERAL CRIME in the US since 2000, BUT:

- Many local law enforcement officers don’t know about modern slavery.
- Those law enforcement officers who do know about slavery often don’t have the training to detect slavery or to build a case against the perpetrators.
- Human trafficking victims are often mistaken for illegal immigrants and are deported.
- Trafficking and slavery are usually hidden. And unlike theft or arson, for example, slavery might not leave a mark.
- Law enforcement can’t see everything that happens in the community, so they will miss many signs of slavery.
- While members of the public help out by calling police to report crimes, most people don’t know how to recognize slavery in their communities.

Your local social service providers and law enforcement agents are critical to fighting trafficking in your community, but they often need community members’ help in a number of ways.

But we, as members of our community, must know what to do! By reading and sharing this guide, you and your community can become prepared to help (and this help IS important) fight trafficking and slavery in America and your community.

How can my community stop slavery?

Those who survive slavery face enormous challenges as they struggle to regain control over their shattered lives. Having been exploited in many ways (economically, emotionally, sexually, and physically), they need help and the tools to begin the long process of healing and reconstruction. Communities across the country are learning that the most effective response to cases of human trafficking and slavery begins with the involvement of a committed group of people. This group then organizes a Community Anti-Trafficking Taskforce, bringing together partners from across the community:

- Law enforcement agencies who protect survivors and prosecute perpetrators
- Immigration attorneys who represent survivors and prosecute perpetrators
- Health clinics who provide emergency health services
- Translators who ensure the survivors can communicate their stories and their needs
- Clinical psychologists who help identify and meet psychological needs
- Leaders in a survivor’s faith community who provide spiritual counsel
- Survivor support groups that help survivors reintegrate into society.

Like an Emergency Preparedness team, the Taskforce plans what they will do when slavery is found in their community. They also begin to educate the public about how to detect trafficked people. When trafficking victims come to light, the community is ready and the survivors receive immediate care while law enforcement moves quickly against the traffickers.

Could your group, faith community, school, or club take the lead in establishing a Community Anti-Trafficking Taskforce? Or if one already exists in your community, would your group be willing to help it grow?

“The trade in human beings for any purpose must not be allowed to thrive in our time.”

Colin Powell
What if you already think you might know of an enslaved person?

If you suspect that someone is a victim of human trafficking call the Human Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 (this is a free call)

A trained social service worker will help you to take the next step.

REMEMBER: Trafficked persons are entitled to legal protection in the US: It does not matter how the person entered the US or whether or not they are working legally. If an adult is controlled by force or threats and held or made to work against their will, they are a victim of trafficking. If a child (anyone younger than 18) is sexually exploited, they may be a victim of trafficking whether or not they were forced or threatened.

You can also call your local, county, or state police, the FBI, or the Justice Department. Whatever you do, don’t hold back, a person’s life may be at stake.

Remember to THINK SAFETY!

If you suspect a situation of human trafficking, the best thing to do is call a professional. Do not try to intervene if you think the situation would endanger you or the person whom you think might need help.

The Human Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline, and other law enforcement, are equipped to take specific information so they can identify victims and take action against perpetrators. Hotlines will want to ask you for:

- Names
- Addresses
- Detailed descriptions of people, places and events
- Vehicle license plate numbers

Individuals around the country, people like Louis, Deetz and Sandy, have helped stop slavery in their communities.

You can too.
What else can we do:

Human traffickers are not limited by national borders; so neither should anti-slavery efforts. There are more than 27 million people enslaved all over the world. How can you help fight slavery and trafficking at their source and their destination? There are a number of easy steps anyone can take:

**Educate yourself**

- Distribute this pamphlet to your community groups, places of worship, businesses, etc. You can buy 5 copies for $10 at [www.freetheslaves.net/communityguide](http://www.freetheslaves.net/communityguide) or by calling 1-866-324-FREE (3733).
- Visit [www.freetheslaves.net/communityguide](http://www.freetheslaves.net/communityguide) and join the Free the Slaves e-update list by sending an email [communityguide@freetheslaves.net](mailto:communityguide@freetheslaves.net).
- Read *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy, by Kevin Bales*. This prize-winning book explains how slavery fits into our economy and our lives. It is available from Free the Slaves, and most bookstores.
- Watch *Slavery: A Global Investigation*; this Emmy and Peabody Award winning film shows and explains modern slavery. Videos and DVDs are available from Free the Slaves.

**Involve your community**

- Get to know your neighbors and local businesses.
- Support local agencies such as domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, and immigrant assistance groups that may help trafficking victims.
- Educate others. Uninformed people are powerless to help!
- Hold a house party to watch *Slavery: A Global Investigation* and discuss it.
- Ask your local school or your children’s teachers to consider teaching a lesson on modern slavery. A Teaching Pack on modern slavery is available from Free the Slaves.
- Ask your faith community to educate its members on slavery and trafficking.
- Could your faith community, club, or group organize your community’s Anti-trafficking Taskforce? Beginning one only takes visiting other groups and then bringing them together for a meeting.

**Use your voice and your vote**

- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to alert others to this issue.
- Let your elected officials know that preventing modern day slavery in the United States is important to you.
Pursue a human rights-related career
Professionals in all areas of expertise are needed to ensure that no one’s basic human rights and dignity are taken from them. To learn more follow: www.freetheslaves.net/communityguide

Use your purchasing power
Ask vendors if their products (clothes, produce, etc.) are Fair Trade or slave-free. Let them know that labor standards are important to you as a consumer, and that you want to be able to purchase merchandise that is produced responsibly.

Donate to Free the Slaves
Your contribution supports:
- Freeing and rehabilitating slaves around the world
- Exposing the problem of slavery through the media and community outreach
- Working with businesses and consumers to remove slavery from the products we buy
- Educating policymakers and encouraging governments to enforce their own laws
- Researching slavery and the best ways to fight it

To order more booklets:
- Go to www.freetheslaves.net/communityguide
- Call 1-866-324-FREE (3733)
- Send the order form below to:
  Free the Slaves 1326 14th St. NW, Washington, DC 20005

Yes, I would like to order:
☐ 10 booklets for $24 ($2 each + S&H)
☐ 25 booklets for $53 ($1.75 each + S&H)
☐ 50 booklets for $77 ($1.50 each + S&H)
☐ 100 booklets for $145 ($1.25 each + S&H) (Discounts available for larger orders)

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Communities make the difference between slavery and freedom

“You say slavery or indentured servitude and people look at you like, ‘not in the United States, not this day and time.’ I say, Oh yeah. It’s alive and well.”

Border Patrol Agent, San Antonio, TX.
Investigated four cases of human trafficking