20 Years of Freedom!

FREEDOM FIRM
RESCUE | RESTORATION | JUSTICE



Message from the President



There are so many words that could describe these past 20 years. Exciting. Frustrating. Crushing. Jubilant. Dusty. Grind. Incredible. But out of them all, Faithful Perseverance.

I am so grateful when I think of every story, every girl rescued, every victory won, but especially the many faithful people who have persevered in the face of incredible challenges to transform hearts, cities, states, and regions.

1100 women and girls would still be in slavery without your faithful perseverance.

Though words are inadequate to capture the impact of 20 years, I hope this short report conveys what we see.

The battle is being won.

Leah Henck
President, Freedom Firm USA

THE BATTLE IS BEING WON.

1100+
girls rescued from sex trafficking

4000
girls impacted through restoration programs

42
perpetrators convicted



Asha Kshirsagar is Program Associate for Freedom Firm's offices throughout India. She shares about the incredible improvements witnessed where change has seemed impossible:

"At a regional level, particularly in areas like Nagpur's Ganga Jamuna red-light district, sustained interventions have led to noticeable disruption of trafficking networks. Traffickers are more cautious and fearful due to consistent monitoring, rescues, and legal action. While trafficking has not been eliminated, it has become more covert, indicating that perpetrators are under pressure.

Nationally, trafficking patterns are shifting, with increased movement across states and more organized networks attempting to evade detection. However, there is also a positive trend of stronger inter-state coordination, improved law enforcement response, and greater recognition of trafficking as a serious crime, largely supported by organizations like Freedom Firm."

our mission

Freedom Firm USA's mission is to end child sex trafficking internationally through rescue, restoration, and justice.

rescue

Investigation teams identify victims and mobilize the police to initiate a raid.

restoration

Social workers guide girls to healthy futures through numerous follow-ups.

justice

Legal teams work to see perpetrators prosecuted & girls empowered to testify.

our pillars

sacrifice

We lay aside the expectation of comfort in pursuit of this mission.

dignity

We believe in the unique and intrinsic worth of each person.

stewardship

We are grateful for every resource and steward them in service of others.

our promise

Our ALL for every ONE

Freedom Firm Highlights

May 1, 2006
Freedom Firm is founded

May 6, 2006
First survivor rescued

"From now on I want my life to matter and make it something really special."

Karishma, Freedom Firm's first rescued girl on the day she testified against her oppressor in court

2006

Aftercare Roja home established

2007

July 2008
First field office opens in Pune

2008

December 2008
First conviction: 2 convicted

2009

+10 new staff, aftercare programs expand: Leg Up horse therapy Ruhamah Designs



Roja aftercare home

2010

October, 2010
First investigations and rescues in Nagpur


METRO

POLICE RESCUE 5 MINOR GIRLS FROM BROTHEL

Arrest a Bangladeshi trafficker who used to bring the girls from Bangladesh by bribing the Bangladesh Security Forces personnel

SIN CITY

Newspaper article showing brothel keeper (left) and trafficker (right) in a 2010 Freedom Firm conviction

2011

57 girls rescued, totalling 200+ girls rescued since 2006

2012

November 1, 2012
Granted approval under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)

2013

August 2013
Public Interest Litigation filed making bail for traffickers more difficult

Nov 2013
Field office opens in Nagpur

2014

Only 17 girls rescued this year. Of the first 100 rescued in Nagpur, 99 girls were released. The battle rages on.

2015

Field office opens in Uttar Pradesh

2016

389 girls rescued by our 10th anniversary

April 2016
Mass raid: police shut down red-light area in Nagpur

Ripples of Freedom Over 20 Years

2018

Repeat trafficker Bindoo Khalkor convicted and sentenced to 7 years imprisonment (+20 years sentence in 2024)

Field office opens in Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh

2019

Field office opens in Kolkata

January 2019
Freedom Firm's 10th conviction!

New officials grant us access to 8 government rehab homes in Maharashtra

2020

Despite COVID-19 63 girls rescued, 110 life-skills lessons, 11 new cases filed against perpetrators, + lifesaving supplies delivered to survivors in 29 cities

2021

November 2021
After major raid in Madhya Pradesh, local police promise future cooperation and response to child prostitution.



2017

March 2017
Police initiate mass raid in Nagpur with Freedom Firm's help. 3 minors found, 48 customers arrested, 95 women + pimps detained.

2022

February 2022
Freedom Firm's 12th conviction!

2023

June 2023
Survivor Simi's brave testimony leads to her offender's 10-year prison sentence

2024

July 2024
1000th girl rescued

July-Aug 2024
Two 20-year prison sentences for offenders: strongest convictions to date

2025

January 2025
First Freedom Camp since COVID

September 2025
Two perpetrators receive lifetime prison sentences in Madhya Pradesh

2026

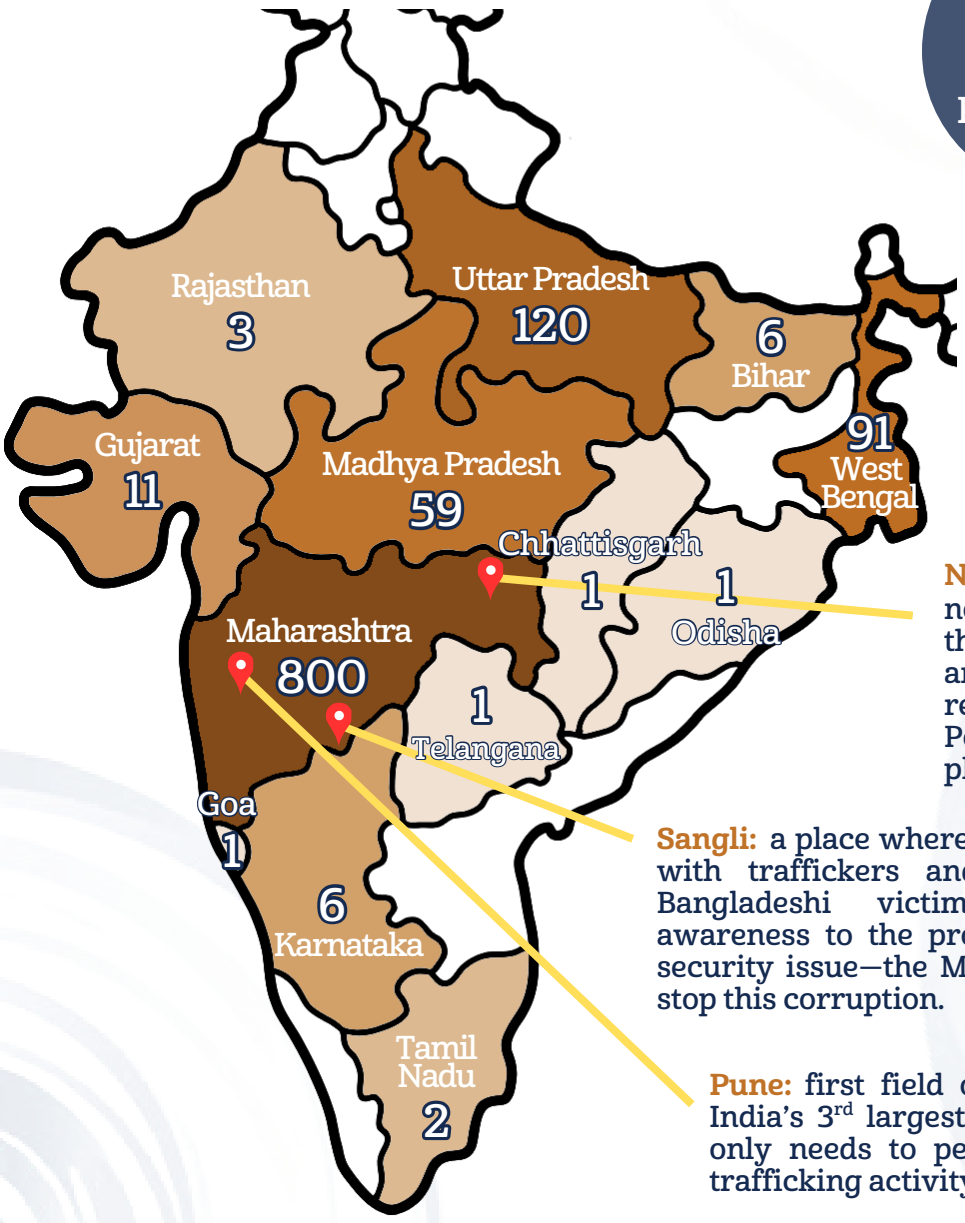
Plans to further expand operations in North India

March 2026
Freedom Firm founders explore new territory to expand into Bangladesh!

Rescue

Over the past 20 years, Freedom Firm undercover operatives carried out countless investigations to locate minor girls in brothels. Along with the police, the team rescued 1100+ girls, and initiated 720+ legal cases against their perpetrators. Survivors were placed safely in shelter homes. In February 2014, one of the investigators' identities was discovered; he was beaten and threatened in a brothel, but this did not cause him to back down. He continued to venture into dangerous areas to rescue girls. Freedom Firm will not back down, but persevere in efforts to rescue girls out of darkness and bring them into the light.

Number of Rescues/State



1100+ Rescues

720+ Cases Filed Against Perpetrators

63 Brothels Shut Down

42 Perpetrators Convicted

Major Breakthroughs

Nagpur: the team was told there's no hope for change here. In 2010 the team began investigations, and to date Freedom Firm has rescued 303 girls from Nagpur. Police now take action & the team plays a monitoring role.

Sangli: a place where some police were hand-in-glove with traffickers and issuing false documents to Bangladeshi victims. Freedom Firm brought awareness to the problem and it became a national security issue—the Mumbai High Court intervened to stop this corruption.

Pune: first field office launched here to address India's 3rd largest red-light area. Today, the team only needs to periodically monitor the area for trafficking activity.

Future Generations Protected



Karishma

The first survivor, 12-year-old Karishma, was rescued in 2006. Today, she lives in her own apartment with her children. She cleans and cooks for large events, and faithfully sends her children to school, paying for all their fees. Karishma's courage and tenacity allow her children to enjoy the freedom of childhood, and they are protected from the horrors she endured as a child.



Asha

At 12 years old, Asha became a child bride. When she tried to end her life a few years later by jumping into a well, a man pulled her out and sold her to a brothel keeper. At 17 years old, she became pregnant and was forced to abort her baby. In 2007, the police rescued her, and Freedom Firm offered her a safe place to stay. She slowly found healing. Today, she is married with a daughter. Asha has learned how to read and write and teaches her daughter. She also works as a cook and tailor and helps to provide for her family.

"I have all I need. I'm very happy now." - Asha

Rescued Girls Help Rescue Other Girls

Neenu

In December 2025, 19-year-old Neenu marched into a Women's police station and lodged a First Information Report against her family for forcing her into prostitution from the time she was just 14 years old. When the Freedom Firm team met her, she shared intel about over 1000 girls, including her three sisters, who were being sexually exploited. A month later, Neenu received good news. The police and Freedom Firm raided a brothel and rescued a 15-year-old victim from the same area Neenu had escaped. The victim turned out to be one of her sisters. What a miracle!

Lata

16-year-old Lata was rescued in 2023 from Nagpur's red-light area, retrafficked by her family, then re-rescued in Rajasthan. After her rescue, she told the social workers about a 6-year-old who was being groomed for prostitution at another nearby brothel. Thanks to Lata's concern and intervention, Freedom Firm was able to rescue the child and save her from future exploitation. Today, both girls are safe.



Restoration

After a survivor is rescued, she begins a journey of restoration. Freedom Firm social workers have walked with some girls since their rescue in 2006. Over the past 20 years, 640 girls experienced Freedom Camps, and over 4,000 girls and women have been impacted by Freedom Firm programs. The Roja Residential home, Leg Up horse therapy program, and the Ruhamah Designs jewelry microenterprise all supported survivors in different seasons. In partnership with shelter homes across the country, Freedom Firm has provided rescued girls with counseling, job training, education, and health care. Even after survivors returned to their villages, our social workers visited and connected with them to offer resources and encouragement. As a result, we have witnessed generations impacted. Future girls are being protected from sexual exploitation.

Social Workers Observe Transformation in Survivors

"Another major highlight is observing survivors regain dignity, confidence, and purpose through Freedom Firm's long-term support. Being part of a mission that brings justice, hope, and lasting change to vulnerable lives has been both humbling and inspiring with their success stories and bright smiles."
- Asha, Freedom Firm Social Worker

"Freedom Firm restoration programs have impacted survivors' lives to help them gain confidence and independence."
– Freedom Firm Social Worker



Survivors in a shelter home in Kolkata share their artwork from a life skills session in December 2024

"Many survivors now show greater awareness of their rights and are more willing to cooperate with rescue teams and legal processes. With proper counseling and consistent support, victims demonstrate increased resilience, hope, and readiness to rebuild their lives—reflecting the impact of holistic restoration efforts."
- Freedom Firm Social Worker

Lives being Rebuilt



Sajini

In August 2011, the team rescued Sajini for a third time in Nagpur's red-light district. Social workers slowly built trust with her, supported her, and taught her life skills to equip her in the future. When she was 18, Sajini returned to her parents and they made every effort to keep her safe. In 2013, some people attempted to re-traffic her, but the villagers and Sajini's family protected her. Sajini slowly rebuilt her life—she got married, had four children, and launched a small business with her husband. With Freedom Firm's support, she established a grocery shop and vegetable garden which provides for her family.

"I like my life better now because I am home, married, and live with people who love and care for me." — Sajini

Sneha

In August 2019, the team rescued 13-year-old Sneha from a brothel in Moradabad. Her grandmother, who was granted custody of her, sold her back into prostitution. The team re-rescued her in December 2019, and she began to rebuild her life. When her grandmother showed interest in exploiting her younger sister, Sneha bravely testified against her in court, despite several threats from her grandmother. Today, Sneha is happily married, expecting a baby, and living in her own home.







Shilu

In February 2022, the team rescued 11-year-old Shilu from a brothel in Madhya Pradesh. Shortly after her rescue, Shilu shared that she had never attended school, and she was very eager to learn. The team helped Shilu enroll in school. She was so excited about her new friends, her uniform, and the opportunity to finally learn how to read and write. Today, Shilu is excelling in school and is in 7th grade. She is finally doing what little girls her age are supposed to do: attend school, make friends, and live carefree.

Justice

Since Freedom Firm's first rescue in 2006, the team has initiated 720+ legal cases against perpetrators, many of which are ongoing. So far, 42 perpetrators have been convicted, two of whom received lifetime convictions. While this number is small given India's 89% acquittal rate in trafficking cases, each conviction is a strong victory of nuclear power that creates tangible effects throughout an entire region. Establishing the rule of law raises the cost of exploitation for traffickers and protects future vulnerable girls. We continue to witness more frequent convictions and stronger sentences. In 2025, Freedom Firm's legal team opposed 97 bail applications, keeping the accused in custody until trial.

"One of the greatest highlights has been witnessing tangible transformation in high-risk areas such as the Ganga Jamuna red-light district in Nagpur. Seeing how relentless efforts, perseverance, and teamwork have led to reduced trafficking activity, successful rescues, and survivor restoration has been deeply meaningful."
– Asha, Freedom Firm Social Worker

Public Interest Litigation

In August 2013, Freedom Firm initiated a key improvement in legislation by filing a Public Interest Litigation to keep the accused in trafficking cases in custody until their hearings. This litigation prevents the accused from receiving bail and disappearing—a frequent obstacle we previously faced. Now, we diligently monitor and oppose bail applications with significant success, ensuring the accused stand trial.

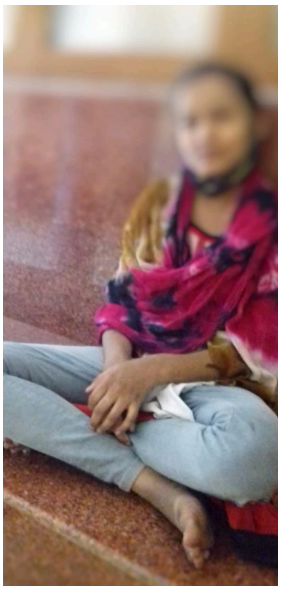
Major Justice Victories

- **Simi** (rescued February 2022 in Nagpur). May 2023, accused received 10 year prison sentence.
- **Shradha** (referred by police in Nagpur in 2021). June 2023, granted Rs 300,000 (~$3,660).
- **Basanti** (rescued November 2023, Kolkata). March 2024, granted Rs 150,000 (~$1,790).
- **Koki** (rescued August 2022, Moradabad). January 2024, compensated Rs 400,000 (~$4,830).
  Rekha (rescued December 2020). July 2024, two accused received 20 year prison sentences and were fined Rs 8,000 each. Rekha was granted Rs 500,000 ($5,670).
- **Prena** (rescued July 2016, Mumbai). August, 2024, two accused received 20 years imprisonment and fined Rs 20,000 (~$230).
- **Sanchi** (referred by police July 2020 for counseling & legal case after she escaped captors and fled to police station in Neemuch). September 2025, two accused sentenced to life in prison. Sanchi was granted Rs. 97,355 (~$1,000).



Hema walks into the Bombay High Court to testify against her accused

Strong Words Against their Accused



Anju

Kidnapped from her home in Madhya Pradesh in 2013 when she was just 8 years old, Anju was trafficked to Mumbai, then sent to a brothel in Nagpur. Freedom Firm rescued Anju in 2021, and in 2022, Anju testified against her accused. She knew exactly what she wanted to say to the judge, "DO NOT GRANT BAIL TO HIM, IF YOU DO SO, HE WILL EXPLOIT AND SPOIL MANY MORE LIVES AS HE DID TO ME. AND OTHER SUCH PERPETRATORS WILL ALSO LIVE FEARLESSLY IF IT HAPPENS." Anju boldly shared her testimony in a special court in Nagpur. She sent waves across the court when she looked at the accused and said, "LET THIS MAN NOT GO UNPUNISHED. He deserves only one punishment, hanging till death."

On September 6, 2022, the main accused in Anju's case was denied bail in the Bombay High Court - Nagpur Bench.

Minu

Minu was rescued in October 2017 from the red-light district in Wani. The brothel keeper, Parveen Sheikh escaped twice. Both times we filed complaints against her and on March 17, 2021, Parveen was placed behind bars without bail for two years and her was brothel sealed and locked. "IT'S GOOD NEWS THAT THE COURT HAS PUNISHED HER," Minu said, when she heard about the two year conviction.

Program Assoicate Asha Kshirsagar said, "This conviction to me is a victory and gives me hope for other cases in Wani, just as a light in the darkness. It will definitely lead to a great awareness and a change in the criminal network who traffic and exploit children for their own interests."





Simi

Four people who were responsible for sexually exploiting 15-year-old Simi (rescued from an apartment in Nagpur on February 3, 2022) were convicted in a Sessions Court in Nagpur and received a 10 year prison sentence. During a celebration party at her shelter home, Simi shared with other survivors, "THERE IS NO NEED TO HAVE ANY ADVOCATE FOR YOU IF YOU ARE BOLD ENOUGH TO SPEAK FOR YOURSELF. I was scared in the beginning . . . but the Freedom Firm staff counseled and motivated me to speak up. This made me speak boldly in court. I DON'T WANT WHAT HAPPENED TO ME TO HAPPEN TO OTHER GIRLS, so this is the main reason why I testified in court."

Partners and Volunteers

Over the past 20 years, hundreds of volunteers and ambassadors have joined us to take action for survivors of sex trafficking. Partners from around the world have stood up and contributed in so many ways, donating generously, volunteering with restoration programs and camps for survivors, hosting awareness events, purchasing survivor-made handicrafts, recording survivors' stories on our podcast, writing encouraging notes to survivors and our team in India, and finding creative ways to use their talents to benefit girls in need. Every action has served to spread awareness in your communities near and far. Thank you to everyone who has partnered with us to bring freedom to girls in India. Your efforts continue to grow into lasting change and empower us to step into the next 20 years.



Creative Contributions



From 2007-2019, many U.S. teams journeyed to India to lead games and programs for survivors at our Freedom Camps.



From 2012-2018, friends in Chicago hosted an annual “Captive No More” banquet to raise funds and awareness for survivors.



Students & staff of Rockford Christian School raised funds for Freedom Firm with their “Casual 4 a Cause” campaign.



In 2022, Shubha organized a “Freedom Walk” at a park in Maryland, and helped to raise awareness and funds for Freedom Firm girls.



In July 2023, Charlie, Sam, and Aaron, hiked the Three Peaks Challenge in 24 hours... BAREFOOT to help raise awareness and funds for Freedom Firm girls.



Artist Allison Lewis creates and sells beautiful artwork and donated a portion to Freedom Firm to help bring rescue, restoration, and justice to victims of sex trafficking.



In March 2023, Sim ran 900 miles for 900 rescued girls to raise awareness. Sim's efforts motivated Freedom Firm supporters to donate $84,500 to continue the work.



From 2024-2026, Samuel, Sarah, and Rebekah have been running/walking miles to raise awareness and funds for Freedom Firm.



In 2025, Jill hosted a Become the One 5K in VA to help raise awareness and funds for Freedom Firm, and she is planning another one!

Future Vision

We have witnessed 20 years of victories and transformation in the problem of child sex trafficking in India, but our work must continue until every girl is free. As we look toward the next 20 years, we anticipate expansion and growth. A new office will be opening this year in northern India, and new outreach is beginning into western India. Our team continues to press forward until we are strategically placed to rescue girls and fight for justice throughout the entire country of India. Freedom Firm founders, Mala and Greg Malstead recently visited Bangladesh to explore further expansion opportunities. Mala shares about their experience:

A Way Out

Greg and I recently visited Bangladesh to explore opening a new Freedom Firm office. We wanted to understand the need, and what was being done about it. On our last day, we visited an ancient brothel across from an NGO helping sex-workers and their children. One of their social workers accompanied us.

Just opposite their office entrance were four "lanes." I've been in Indian brothels before—catacombs of shoulder-width alleys, open gutters, and a chaotic labyrinth of rooms stretching for kilometers. This was different.

What struck me was the precise architecture. The four lanes were exact, planned—perfect prisons. Each lane was a four-foot-wide alley extending from the street about 40 feet into a closed rectangle. Each entrance was guarded by brothel keepers—sold into prostitution as children themselves, now promoted to prison guards. They controlled each girl's life, minute by minute, customer by customer.

Greg and I walked in, past the hostile madame and the young women waiting for passersby. A few feet farther in squatted a burly pimp. Suddenly we were in a narrow courtyard open to the sky, with two stories of rooms connected by corridor balconies.

There was no exit.



A 500 year old brothel layout in Bangladesh, bustling and active in 2026

We walked the four sides of the ground floor—room after room, woman after woman, all engaged in various tasks. We didn't see any minors. They all know its illegal, and word travelled fast from the door-keepers that we were on the way. Dark rooms with doors that locked could easily hide the young ones.

It was early afternoon, hot and close. Old women, more dead than alive, wrinkled and worn, chopped and stirred large vats of rice. They were once young. Did they spend their lives here? They were cooking for fifty.

We climbed stairs so narrow we had to turn our bodies sideways. The second floor mirrored the first—rooms on all four sides. Some women approached us and wanted to shake hands; others kept their distance. One young mother held her newborn baby girl. She shrank back into the shadows when I smiled and moved towards the baby.

What would be her future?
Did she stand a chance?

There is a closed loop here.
Born here, die here.

That brothel in Bangladesh is still with me. The blueprint of a girl's life: a narrow, guarded alley leading into a courtyard of rooms—no place to hide, everything visible, communal. Narrow staircases, narrow corridors.

The only way out is the way in.

No back doors. No escape. No one gets in unless you are a victim—or a customer.

And that's what Freedom Firm does.

We send in undercover investigators posing as a customer to find children and get them out with the aid of police. For 20 years, good men have risked their lives entering these places, searching for children who cannot choose to leave. The law is on our side, though it takes years to change attitudes, apathy, and corruption.

This year marks 20 years of Freedom Firm rescuing and restoring girls from sexual slavery and holding perpetrators accountable.

My brother Andy Hicks championed Freedom Firm from its inception in 2006 until this February, when he and his 17-year-old daughter Coco were killed in a car accident on Valentine's Day. Two months before, Andy had called Greg and me in India.

"You need to get back into anti-trafficking work."

A 30-page proposal followed. He had analyzed Freedom Firm's impact in India, showing that after seven years in a city, we begin to see lasting change. Police shift—from resistant and corrupt to active and engaged in protecting trafficked children. Seven years of struggle before the tipping point.

Greg and I were sold, again.

After seven years in the U.S. pursuing other paths, Andy's voice called us back—to pursue justice for girls sold into prostitution.

Today, we have proof of change in India. In cities where we've had sustained presence, minors are hard to find. The courts are increasingly convicting criminals. A multitude of stories testify to changed lives.

Girls would still be imprisoned within four walls and a single entrance—but for persistent work, a plan carried out thousands of times, and a vision that calls us back again and again:

that every single girl should be free.

Mala Malstead
Co-Founder, Freedom Firm

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the innumerable people who through your leadership, service, support, and counsel have impacted the girls we serve. You have built the foundation that Freedom Firm stands on today. Thank you!

We are deeply thankful for each of you who continues to carry the torch forward. Together, let us persevere in our fight for freedom knowing that every girl is worth it.



Photo by survivor, Kalpana. Despite her traumatic past, Kalpana displays tremendous potential. She learned to make beautiful jewelry, is literate in Hindi and English, and completed a 3 month photography course. Four times a week she walked the streets, fields, mountains, and markets of Ooty, Tamil Nadu to capture stunning photos. Her photos were displayed in a gallery called, "Beyond the Darkness," in downtown Ooty. These pictures move beyond her past. They are a gift to the world, reflecting a bright new perspective of a transformed present, and proclaiming a vibrant hope for her future.

Join the Fight

As we continue to press forward, will you join us and bring rescue to the next girl? Visit freedomfirm.org/give or scan the QR code to give today:

Give today!