

Dozens Run to Free Victims of Human Trafficking

✖ A Florida-based ministry is racing to end human trafficking.

Run for Freedom will host a 5K race in Cocoa Beach Saturday to raise money and awareness about what the United Nations calls one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world.

“Our main purpose is to raise awareness about human trafficking,” said Rachel Manzo, whose parents founded Run for Freedom. “Most people think that it only happens overseas ... but [it’s] right here in our own back yard.”

Listen to Rachel Manzo discuss human trafficking

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Every year 1.2 million children and teenagers worldwide are abducted or coerced into prostitution, pornography or forced labor. This year the average victim is 13 years old.

Roughly 100 people are expected to walk or run just over three miles Saturday. The event is Run for Freedom’s fifth 5K since September.

“[Sex trafficking is] nothing new,” said Mary Ann Manzo, who co-founded Run for Freedom with her husband, Pat. “It’s been around a long time, but in the day and age we live in, it is one of the fastest growing criminal activities happening in our world.”

The Manzos, who launched the ministry earlier this year, plan to use donations from the 5K to open a home for rescued

trafficking victims. The ministry seeks to house 14 young women in the Dream Home, which is expected to open on Jan.1.

“It’s not the same as a drug rehab or an abused domestic violence situation,” Mary Ann Manzo told Charisma. “It’s very unique and different.”

Listen to Mary Ann Manzon discuss Run for Freedom

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The women, rescued by Florida law-enforcement during brothel raids, will be given spiritual rehabilitation through counseling and chapel services, and will be taught a trade. Upon leaving the one-year program, the women will be assisted with job placement.

Mary Ann Manzo says Christians who can’t run for freedom can help victims of sex trafficking through donations and prayer. She notes that some churchgoers also may be unwittingly contributing to the problem by secretly viewing pornography online.

“Unfortunately, statics are high in Christians being involved in pornography privately online,” Mary Ann Manzo said. “We need to know that anytime we visit a site and click on something to view, whether it’s paid for or unpaid for, we are becoming part of the demand. And the supply will need to be met. As we cut that demand back and become more holy in our style of living before God, we are able to help the problem that way as well.”