

How Sex Traffickers Lure Victims With Promise of Family, Love

Jeanne Allert left her comfortable, corporate life to answer God's call to help victims of sex trafficking. Allert had no idea what she was walking into when she agreed to join a Korean Presbyterian group ministering in a rough part of Baltimore. It was there that she had a divine appointment with a trafficking victim named Heather, and Allert's life would never be the same. Heather "put a face" on the issue of sex trafficking. "Once you have an encounter like that, you can't look back," Allert says. "That led me to sell my home, sell my company, make a complete 180 in my life. But I wouldn't have missed a moment of it because of the richness that comes from knowing that you're now leading a life of purpose and selflessness."

Leaving her thriving Washington, D.C., consultancy, she founded The Samaritan Women, a nonprofit organization based in Baltimore and serving trafficking victims from across the country.

"We started with a call to directly serve the wounded, those who have been victimized in domestic sex trafficking, and for the first 12-13 years of The Samaritan Women's existence, we were operating residential shelter programs that offered restorative care," Allert says. "Young women would be referred from all over the country, they would come live with us, we would offer comprehensive services and programming, and [we'd] do life with them as they walked through the very difficult steps of rebuilding their lives. The goal is that they would re-enter society in a productive and healthier way."

When a victim leaves the sex trade, there is much that needs

to be restored in her life. "A lot of the wounds that we attend to are the wounds inflicted in childhood that are still present today, and trafficking in many ways just re-exploits those vulnerabilities," Allert says.

Like child molesters, traffickers methodically groom and then break down a victim until they look like they are compliant in the sex industry. Children who have experienced physical or sexual abuse, fatherlessness, abandonment, substance abuse or estrangement from a stable family environment are vulnerable to the ploys of the trafficker.

"It's the disruption or the absence of a secure and loving family that makes children most vulnerable," Allert says. As a result, traffickers often use a "relational hook and lure" that manifests with promises of "I'll be your daddy; we'll be a family; I'll love you forever"—and if you haven't had that, it's a ploy that works!

Sex trafficking breaks down the whole person. The Samaritan Women organization has seen significant medical, dental and spiritual needs that must be met after a woman is recovered. Most of all, victims must have help in reclaiming their personhood or identity.

"What we have found from this population largely is that the No. 1 spiritual need that they have is to reconnect with the self, and that's really an identity issue," Allert says. "This is a population that often has their identity stripped. They might get a new name. They might get their identification taken away. They certainly are removed from their family. They become kind of a persona non grata, a nonperson ... a product."

Allert has seen that victims wrestle with finding answers to life's existential questions: "Why was I born? If I was just born for abuse, why was I born? Does God really have a purpose for me? Do I matter? and more."

Visit to learn more about the work of The Samaritan Women.

Listen to this podcast interview to learn more about what victims endure and how Christians can follow Holy Spirit's lead to help.