

Swedish Christian Rescues Women From Sex Trafficking

In Stockholm, women from around the world are finding real love that frees them from the sex that once enslaved them. After listening to each other's stories of rescue from the hushed world of **sex trafficking**, tears fill the eyes of everyone in the room, and joy is experienced for the first time.

Swedish Christian Anna Sander works among these **women**, young and old, in a nongovernmental organization called Talitha. The name originates from the account in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus said, "*Talitha koum*," meaning "Little girl, rise up," and brought a young girl from death to life.

The broken handcuffs Sander daily pins to her shirt represent being set free in Jesus' love. This message of freedom is constantly welcomed with tears of joy by those being rescued from sex slavery.

Sander's life was changed by the gospel she once rejected. While staying with a Christian host family in Georgia through an exchange program, she went to Florida to help victims of Hurricane Andrew. She saw the difference in the reactions of Christians and non-Christians and explained, "Being a Christian is not what I thought, and I decided that I wanted to be a Christian."

Involvement with Talitha enables Sander to live out her Christian faith. Talitha offers trauma therapy and twice-weekly psychoeducation and Bible teaching on topics such as self-esteem, values and other moral issues. Many of the women have never learned to set a plan for their future.

Sander shares the story of one of these women.

While in Latvia, one girl met the man of her dreams, and he charmed her with promises of a better life in Western Europe, where he said the rest of his relatives lived. She gladly went ahead to France to meet his sisters and relatives.

“When she got there,” Sander says, “she understood that there was nothing that he had talked about, and she ended up in prostitution pretty much right away and never saw this man again.”

Her life of prostitution took her around Europe under the power of an older woman. Eventually the police found the young woman and imprisoned her and her fellow workers, along with the woman who owned them.

Upon being released, the young woman decided to stop prostituting herself, but “she met several people from that network in the street and they threatened her,” Sander says, “and they also murdered a member of her family because she refused to go back into prostitution. So she came [to Sweden] and ended up in prostitution in Sweden because she had no way to support herself. She was almost starving to death, so she had to sell herself.

“A person from church found her in a prostitution street and said, ‘I know Talitha—that’s an organization that can help you.’ So they sent her to us. We have helped her now for two years, and she’s doing really good. Really good. She’s working, she’s learning Swedish and she’s doing fine.”

Sander’s love flows through every aspect of her life into love for all the people of Stockholm. As she works with others, including International Mission Board representatives David and Laura Moench, to plant a church in the heart of the city, her hopes outweigh her doubts of the city coming to know Jesus.

Much of what they do in church planting has been adapted from churches elsewhere in the country and throughout the world.

"This is a brand new church, only since the 10th of March, and we try to do different kinds of outreach," Sander says.

Some opportunities to talk about Jesus come as they take a coffee wagon to a strategic intersection in Stockholm and offer free coffee. They also host children's events that allow families to meet others in the community. Other relationships are forged as artists visit each other's exhibitions and discuss common interests.

Sander pleads for prayer on behalf of Sweden and asks readers, "Pray for the Swedish hearts, because they are so hard and they are so focused on material things and what they think is to have success in life. Pray that their hearts will be broken and start to search for God."

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