

http://wwno.org/post/northshore-shelter-provides-safety-victims-human-trafficking?utm_referrer=http%3A//m.wwno.org/%3Futm_referrer%3D%23mobile/76816

Northshore Focus 7:18 am Wed March 11, 2015

Northshore Shelter Provides Safety For Victims Of Human Trafficking

By [Tegan Wendland](#)

Rafael and Beth Salcedo have a mission — to help underage victims of human trafficking. Their newly-licensed shelter is intended to help young girls across the south.



Beth Salcedo, cofounder of the Free Indeed Home for underage victims of human trafficking, sits in one of the rooms she decorated.

Credit Tegan Wendland / WWNO

Rafael Salcedo used to work as a counselor for the Department of Family and Children's services. A few years ago he started to see young clients who had been victims of sex trafficking. It was disturbing to him and his wife Beth.

"Originally we thought of sex trafficking as something that happened overseas, in the Caribbean, in Central America, but it's happening right here, it's happening in Louisiana, it's happening on the north shore," said Salcedo.

Last year the state legislature [passed new laws](#) cracking down on sex trafficking, making Louisiana's laws the [strictest in the country by some measures](#). But Beth said there are hundreds of young people being trafficked locally and it's still a big problem for law enforcement.



A communal space inside the Free Indeed Home, a shelter for underage victims of human trafficking.

Credit Tegan Wendland / WWNO

She said an officer with the human trafficking task force in Orleans Parish explained to her that the problem was hard to tackle because of a lack of funding for programs that address trafficking, and that, even after law enforcement intervention, girls often end up back on the streets. "It's very, very disheartening," Beth said.

The Salcedos decided to do everything they could to open a center for girls under age 18 that would offer safety, refuge and healing. It's called "The Free Indeed Home."

First they started the Louisiana Coalition Against Human Trafficking, an advocacy program that provides information and referrals, as well as trainings for local social service providers including police and social workers. Then they started raising the hundreds of thousands of dollars they need for the home. Now, the spacious old country home they've converted to house ten underage girls is ready.



A bedroom decorated by Beth Salcedo inside the Free Indeed Home.

Credit Tegan Wendland / WWNO

Beth explained her mentality in decorating the home, “I imagined being a child, and what do children and young girls want.”

The two-story country house is in a confidential location in order to protect the girls. It has an exercise room, four bedrooms with two beds each, a huge dining room and kitchen, and offices for counselors and case managers.

Beth and Rafael said recidivism is a big issue with these young girls. Foster families often don't know how to deal with their issues, which can include serious PTSD and other mental health issues. And the girls often end up back on the streets. The new home will address the challenges comprehensively with in-home psychiatric care, educational and self-help classes, 24/7 supervision and access to outside resources like health and dental care.



The dining room area inside Free Indeed Home.
Credit Tegan Wendland / WWNO

Through networking with other agencies, they've already identified ten candidates for the program. Beth has shown them pictures of the room on her cell phone.

She said, “One of the little girls has identified this room as the room that they want. Many of the little girls tell me, ‘Miss Beth, this is the room that I imagine if I were a child.’ This little girl was actually trafficked by a gang from another state and brought over here, re-trafficked, and then, come to find out, her mother was labor-trafficked. So it's sometimes generational.”

Unfortunately, she said, they can only house ten girls at a time, and there's a need for more shelters like this. There are only about 15 in the nation.

Rafael said the girls come from all sorts of different backgrounds.



Beth and Rafael Salcedo, founders of the Free Indeed Home.
Credit Tegan Wendland / WWNO

“There is something about their demeanor, there’s a hardness that they develop, and more importantly, there’s something missing in their eye contact that seems to reflect pain of a very profound nature. And that would be not surprising given the way that they are treated when they are in these horrendous situations in which they find themselves,” he said.

Beth explained that many of them meet predators online.

The goal is to create a refuge for the girls so that they can learn new behavioral patterns and begin to heal. Rafael said their main goal was to create a warm and welcoming space, “It’s a safe house but it doesn’t feel like a shelter or a jail, it feels like a home.”

The Free Indeed Home received their license to operate in February and they’re expecting to start housing girls right away.

Support for Northshore Focus provided by the Northshore Community Foundation