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Hall woman fighting world's sex trade business

by Ken Stanford

GAINESVILLE - It may be Gainesville's best kept secret.

While not physically located here, Rahab's Rope Women's Center is the mission of a Hall County woman - who founded it - and provides now provides a shelter for women trying to escape the world's sex slave trade. The women are provided food, shelter, protection, education and vocational training to help them rebuild their lives.



Rahab's Rope building

Vickie Moore of Gillsville founded Rahab's two years ago.

"I first saw it (information about the sex trade industry) on the Internet while doing research

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Vickie Moore

for our church for mission work," Moore says on this Sunday's Northeast Georgia This Week, which airs at 5:35 a.m. on WDUN NEWS TALK 550, which, like AccessNorthGa.com, is a division of Jacobs Media Corp.

Moore says she began to investigate further and soon became aware of the enormity of human trafficking not only in India but around the world.

"Each year over four million women and children are trafficked into prostitution and slave labor. Every day in India over 200 girls and women are forced into the sex industry. Human trafficking in India alone generates over \$4 million per day. Each day in India the birth of a girl is often a burden and she is not fed properly, loved or educated. She is kept under lock and key (by her family) for most of her childhood until she is sold. Women in that part of the world just have zero value."

In light of her findings, Moore says she felt compelled to join the fight against human trafficking and was soon introduced to Dr. David Dass of India Gospel League in Bangalore, India, in May 2004. She says he had a similar vision for the women and children who are being exploited. With their meeting, the idea for the shelter was born.

"Field workers were hired and began building relationships with the women on the streets of Bangalore," India's third-largest city, with a population of about 6 million. And, it is considered one of the country's more progressive cities.

Moore says the field workers approach the women on the streets and try to explain to them that they are there to help them and that there is a safe place for them to live and get help. She says its not uncommon for the women to be suspicious of the offer, often running from the or asking if they are with the police. Moore says prostitution is illegal in India but is pervasive because the police often look the other way - especially for a price.

Moore says none of her workers have ever encountered violence on the part of the owners of the women they are trying to help. They go out of their way not to have a confrontation with them. She says the most notable such incident occurred when one of the men showed up at the shelter and spent hours verbally abusing the woman who had been taking off the street. Moore says he never tried to enter the compound but grew progressively louder and more abusive.

The shelter is in a gated compound where the women are allowed to stay as long as they need to. However, those with AIDS or children cannot spend the night. Moore says they simply don't have the room to accomodate children.

In December of 2004 a Christmas Celebration, was held at which 100 of the women, called Commercial Sex Workers or CSWs, came to learn about Rahab's Rope. Last year, Moore says, they were expecting 250 and 570 showed up and plans are being finalized for this year's Christmas Celebration.

"We currently have a full team of 15 people," Moore says. "Our Christmas Celebration reaches more women at one time than any other occasion we have all year. On our Christmas team (this year), we have a group of ladies that work at Gainesville Care Center, a crisis pregnancy center."

Moore says this is an important addition to the Christmas celebration team.

"I am so excited about this because I have been wanting to get into the government housing for unwed mothers for over a year and have not been allowed. This is a very hopeless place with many of our target group living there. I believe and am trusting God to use this group of ladies, with their experience from the Gainesville Care Center, to get us in the door."

The building that houses the shelter was located and leased in January 2005 and by that March a staff was hired and the first residents were living at Rahab's Rope Women's Center. But before that happened, several times a suitable building was found only to be rejected by the landlord when he was told the building would be used to house CSW's, according to Moore.

The center is named for a biblical prostitute, Rahab, and "rope" symbolizes the shelter's goal of pulling these women from their lives of despair, Moore says.

"The emphasis of Rahab's Rope is on extending compassionate care and the love and forgiveness of Jesus, responding to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of these especially vulnerable people and respecting the person and helping the person to be spiritually empowered to face the world that so easily blames them."

Moore says most of them have no skills, no education and have to be taught the most elementary of things to prepare to return to "the mainstream of society...creating a group of people who are no longer forced into prostitution and feel that it is the only resort to a livelihood, who are not threatened, defenseless or without support."

Moore says the shelter is funded through donations and sales of East Indian arts and crafts at a thrift store in Maysville. It is open Wednesday-Friday, 10:00-5:00 and Saturday, 10:00-3:00. Rahab's Hope also has booths at such events as fall festivals.

Moore, who travels to India "two or three times a year," is making plans to expand into other locations - by renting all the homes along entire streets elsewhere in India.

"This is something we are working on and can hopefully have up and running next year."

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The material for this article came from an interview with Moore for Northeast Georgia This Week, 5:35, Sunday, WDUN NEWS TALK 550, and from the Rahab's Rope Women's Shelter Web site.)