



sisters helping sisters break free

# ANNUAL REPORT

---

JULY 1, 2016 – JUNE 30, 2017

# Letter from the Executive Director

---

This past year was not without its challenges. There has been a shift in climate in many areas of sex trafficking in regards to how we, as a state and community, perceive sex trafficking and where we are going to focus our resources. One such shift is in how we are choosing to view adult women being victimized through prostitution. Although we are very happy that many women and girls over the age of 18 are no longer being arrested for prostitution, we are discovering that people struggle to understand how to work alongside and help these victims when they are not being viewed as criminals. In the past, arrests were often used as a gateway to services for victims, and while we hoped that this shift in perception from criminal to victim would lead to an increase in referrals we have found that instead this decrease in arrests has resulted in an overall decrease in outreach from much of the community. Many of these women are now being left to remain living lives lost on the streets while the focus has instead shifted towards youth in prostitution – a very worthy cause which should, of course, remain a pivotal focus of our work, just not to the extent that it blinds us to all the other victims who no longer fit within that population description. The simple fact is, not all youth understand the dynamics of how they got caught up in “the life”, or how to navigate life independently outside of the support systems available solely to youth. Eventually these victims “age out” and become adults who continue to experience sexual exploitation, but now without the supportive systems in place available to support them as youth.

Breaking Free is working to fill this gap and to guarantee that women are still being connected to services available to them. We are networking with all of the Safe Harbor Navigators to ensure that we are indeed getting referrals through their triage efforts for those individuals 18 and over. We are educating communities and other service providers to identify adult victims of prostitution and make referrals to appropriate services. We are training teams to conduct regular street outreach in high-trafficking areas so that we can meet these women where they're at. We are continuing to support, fight for, and believe in every woman's right to live lives free of sexual violence – regardless of age.

While Breaking Free continues to work on spreading education and information, we all know that this is just the first step of a lengthy process. Stopping the Demand continues to be another big focus. Breaking Free runs a monthly “Johns' School” which aims to reduce the demand that fuels sex trafficking. Our philosophy is that arresting and prosecuting offenders does not necessarily dissuade future illegal activity. Best practice in criminal corrections combines arrest and prosecution with treatment. Our program addresses the underlying assumptions and attitudes that enable offenders to participate in prostitution.

Breaking Free programming is designed to hold the offender accountable while raising awareness and providing resources to the women and children victimized by prostitution. To that end, over this past year we have enhanced the programs which we offer women and their families based on quantitative and qualitative empirical data. One of the new programs that we launched this year is the Parenting Support group facilitated by Wilder Foundation. We know that there is a vast increase in the number of girls and women that have been recruited into the life by their family members. Breaking that cycle of abuse is one of our goals and this program works to achieve that. Although our housing program is always at capacity, we have entered into contract with Hearth Connection as an additional resource to house our women that are chronically homeless by providing them with rental assistance for permanent housing outside of Breaking Free. We've also implemented a Writer's Bureau and Speaker's Bureau to support and educate those survivors who are interested in telling their story verbally or in written form. There are a lot of dynamics that go into empowering ourselves and we want to be there throughout the process so that our women and girls can successfully achieve their personal goals in a healthy, non-shaming manner.

Finally, I am very excited about what 2017-2018 is going to bring. Breaking Free will continue to be on the cutting edge of providing services to sexually exploited women and girls. We will also be a key player in the Super Bowl 52 Anti-Trafficking efforts. Breaking Free is one of the few providers that will be hosting a drop-in center for the 10 days leading up to the game itself and will remain open for 24 hours during that time. We will also be working with Sargent Grant Snyder and the "official" Super Bowl police force as they host six command centers around the cities, where an advocate will be available during stings. We are also working on coordinating street outreach with the Link, Youthlink, MIWRC, Pride and Street Works.

As you can see, none of this work can be done alone. Breaking Free cannot exist without the incredible support of our wonderful staff, volunteers, donors, partners, colleagues, community organizations, and individuals such as yourself. On behalf of myself and the Board of Directors, I want to thank each of you for remaining an integral part of the growing success of Breaking Free!

Sincerely,  
Terry Forliti



**Breaking Free, Inc.** was established in October 1996, by Founder Vednita Carter, as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization serving women and girls involved in systems of abuse and commercial sexual exploitation. While based in African American culture, Breaking Free is committed to working with diverse populations of sexuality exploited women and girls. Our headquarters are in St. Paul, Minnesota, with one satellite office in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Over the last 21 years, Breaking Free has served more than 7,500 clients and reached many more via street outreach, while systematically growing our programming to embrace a full continuum of care including advocacy, education, permanent housing, life/job skills, and also criminal justice advocacy and public policy programs that educate the community, raise awareness, and decrease demand for commercial sex.



**Mission:** To end all forms of prostitution and sex-trafficking.

**Our Overall Goal:** Breaking Free strives to empower women and girls to choose healthy, self-sufficient lifestyles by improving the quality of survivors leaving systems of violence by assisting them in assuming responsibility over their own lives and functioning as actively and independently in society as possible to achieve self-sufficiency.

Our other fundamental goals include but are not limited to:

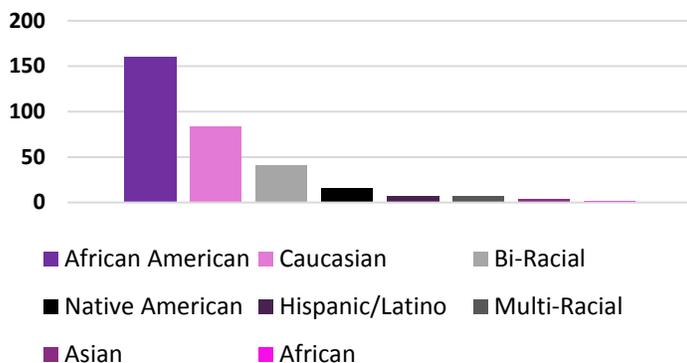
- Providing education, crisis intervention, and advocacy to sex trafficked women and girls.
- Decreasing women's exposure to and involvement in systems of violence (i.e. sex trafficking, domestic violence, physical/sexual/emotional abuse, and/or homelessness).
- Coordinating, facilitating, and connecting families with community resources and services that will assist them with increasing and maintaining stability.
- Providing and coordinating safe, stable housing for women/girls and their children.
- Offering opportunities for education and life skills to prepare clients for the workforce, to enable them to move out of poverty to become self-sustaining, and improve the parenting skills of mothers.
- Operating within a trauma-informed, survivor-led, culturally appropriate, age and gender-specific context realizing that women respond to other people who understand the trauma they have experienced, and their specific cultures, challenges, and family dynamics.
- Educating the community about the effects of commercial sexual exploitation on women and girls and the negative effects on the community at large.
- Bringing change to public policy regarding the treatment of victims and the prosecution of pimps and "johns," while working to reduce demand by educating men and boys.

# Breaking Free's 2016-2017 Demographics

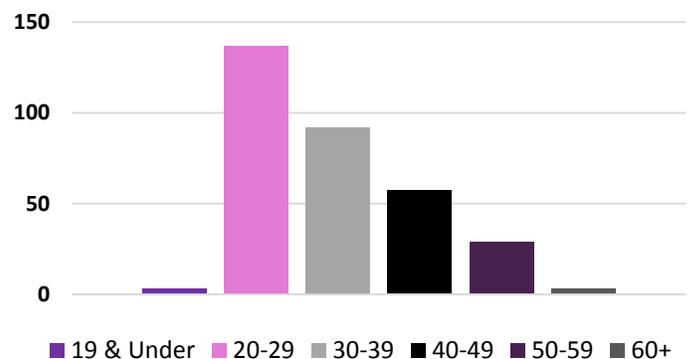
## Overall Stats & Demographics

- 321 sex trafficked women and girls received advocacy and direct services
  - 74% were women/girls of color
  - 55% had minor children at the time of intake
    - 100% were living in poverty
    - 92% were chemically dependent
  - 55% were homeless or in need of safe housing
    - 96% were from the Twin Cities metro area
  - 2% were from Greater Minnesota or out of state
    - 2% were from other geographic locations
- 52% suffered from some type of emotional, physical, or mental disability

### Racial Demographics:



### Age Demographics:



The primary target population that we work with is females in the age range of 18-63 years, all who have been exploited sexually for commercial purposes. They are predominantly African American women of color (74%); of low socioeconomic status, most of them are single parents with an average of one to three children, and most struggle with poor mental health and chemical abuse issue.

Breaking Free families suffer from many complex problems related to poverty including prostitution, limited education and vocational experience, drug dependency, abuse and criminal histories often related to their abuse. Breaking Free clients are typically referred to as "hard-core clients", many of whom have been previously unsuccessful in getting their lives back on track.

## Direct Services, Education & Life/Job Skills

- 241 women and girls attended educational/support groups
- 256 legal/criminal advocacy services were provided
- 8 survivors enrolled in higher education or have completed their GED
- 62 utilized resources and opportunities for life/job skills and higher education
- 446 personal advocacy and crisis intervention services were provided
- 6 incarcerated women and girls received access to services and education
- 27 women and girls completed the 14-week curriculum and graduated from the Sisters of Survival Program

## Public Policy & Social Change

- 128 perpetrators attended the Offenders Prostitution Program (“John School”)
- Breaking Free increased its reach by collaborating with new partners in the criminal justice system to increase referrals into our diversion programs for both victims and perpetrators
- 57 presentations and training’s were made to the community, schools, professional and civic groups, churches, service providers, law enforcement and prosecution, and the court system, reaching 4,913 people



## Housing

60-90% of Breaking Free’s clients are in need of safe housing to be able to live free of sex trafficking and exploitation. Breaking Free is the only program in the United States to provide permanent supportive housing for survivors.

127 women, girls, and their children/family members resided in Breaking Free’s housing program

**Permanent Housing:** 52 Clients, 60 of their minor children, and 15 adult children, spouses or partners

# Survivor Success Story

---

Born and raised in the Chicago housing projects, LaWanda's future had little hope. Raped repeatedly by her uncles and cousins at seven years old, she never told anyone afraid that her family would be killed.

LaWanda's childhood had been brutally taken away from her, and as an early teen marijuana became her solace.

Finally the unconditional love LaWanda had never felt arrived with the birth of her first child at fifteen. However, the reality of supporting her baby girl turned LaWanda to prostitution and life got worse. Marijuana use turned to cocaine addiction for the next ten years.

A family member suggested she get away from Chicago and at 26 LaWanda moved to Minneapolis. She found work but soon lost her job when she was caught stealing to support her drug habit. Addicted to crack cocaine, LaWanda turned to the only thing she knew – prostitution. She joined the other girls on the street corner looking to make enough money to stay high. LaWanda would do anything for a fix. One night the guy she was with tied her feet and put a plastic bag over her head. She thought it was the end, but somehow she managed to survive. LaWanda was looking for “fatherly love and acceptance”, but men just kept using her. She was arrested many times but never sent to prison. Every time the judge sentenced her to probation, saying “I believe there is good in you”.

LaWanda was in and out of treatment several times. Every time she returned to the street searching for happiness but only finding pain and abuse. Then her brother, a male prostitute, was murdered and LaWanda felt it was all her fault. She remembered going to church with her Grandmother as a child, but that was so long ago. She knew she was better than the life she was living. While in treatment, LaWanda surrendered her life to God. When LaWanda was in treatment, she attended Breaking Free and completed the 14-week Sisters of Survival program and is now working at Breaking Free!

During all the years of abuse she was repeatedly beaten and hit in the face causing a retina to detach. LaWanda recently had her eye removed but she proudly said, “God has given me double the vision in the other eye”. Her self-esteem is up, and she believes she can do whatever she sets her mind to. On Thursday afternoon LaWanda facilitates our Sisters of Survival group in Minneapolis. On Friday nights you can find LaWanda back on the streets, but now she is part of the ICCM Life Center Church Friday Night Street Team. Reaching out to the lost and hurting, praying for them and letting everyone know that, “God Is My Refuge!”



# 2016-2017 Major Funders

---

## Major Funders:

Department of Justice

HUD

Anti-Human Trafficking Work Group- Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet & Consociates

Butler Foundation

Luther Replogle

Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters & Associates

Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

North Heights Benevolent Fund

St. Paul Foundation Capacity Building

Jaye F & Betty F Dyer Foundation

## Breaking Free Board of Directors

---

Breaking Free, Inc. has a governing board of four diverse directors from varying professional backgrounds and areas of expertise. During this past year, our board has successfully balanced our budget and provided strategic leadership and financial oversight that has taken our organization to a new level of stability that sets us up for a sustainable future.

- Jeff Kuhlman, Vice President, Wells Fargo
- Autumn Burris, Executive Director, Survivors 4 Solutions
- Tom Child, Businessman & Entrepreneur
- Grace Child, Territorial Sales Manager of Mohawk Industries

## Breaking Free Staff

---

Currently Breaking Free staff consists of the Executive Director, Office/HR Manager, Women's Program Manager, Systems Analyst, Receptionist, Legal Advocate, Housing Advocates, Volunteer Coordinator, and Career Advancement Specialist/Women's Program Advocate. A majority of the staff are survivors of sex trafficking, which gives them a unique ability to relate with the women and girls we serve.

# YOU can help women and girls break free!

**Sponsor:** make a monetary donation (monthly or one-time)

**Invite:** ask us to speak at your organization, school or church

**Donate:** food, furniture, gift cards, baby items, hygiene supplies

**Educate:** host an awareness event or goods drive

**Volunteer:** your time, talents, or services

[www.breakingfree.net](http://www.breakingfree.net)

651-645-6557

P.O. Box 4366 Saint Paul, MN 55104