



It's safe haven

The Salvation Army is stepping up the fight against modern-day slavery by opening Australia's first safe house for victims of human trafficking, in Sydney. **LAUREN MARTIN** reports

Ask people if they're aware of human trafficking and the majority will likely say "no". It's not an item on the 6pm news, it's not a headline in the morning papers and it's certainly not a "BBQ stopper", to borrow a phrase from former prime minister John Howard. The issue of human trafficking is simply not on the radar of most ordinary Australians.

Yet millions of people are trafficked every year ... and some of them end up right here in "the lucky country". Not so lucky for them.

Jenny, Supervisor of The Salvation Army's safe house for trafficked women, says: "[They've] been brought to Australia usually through some type of deception and forced to work against their will in a variety of industries — could be in the sex industry, could be in agriculture, restaurants, as domestic workers ... the

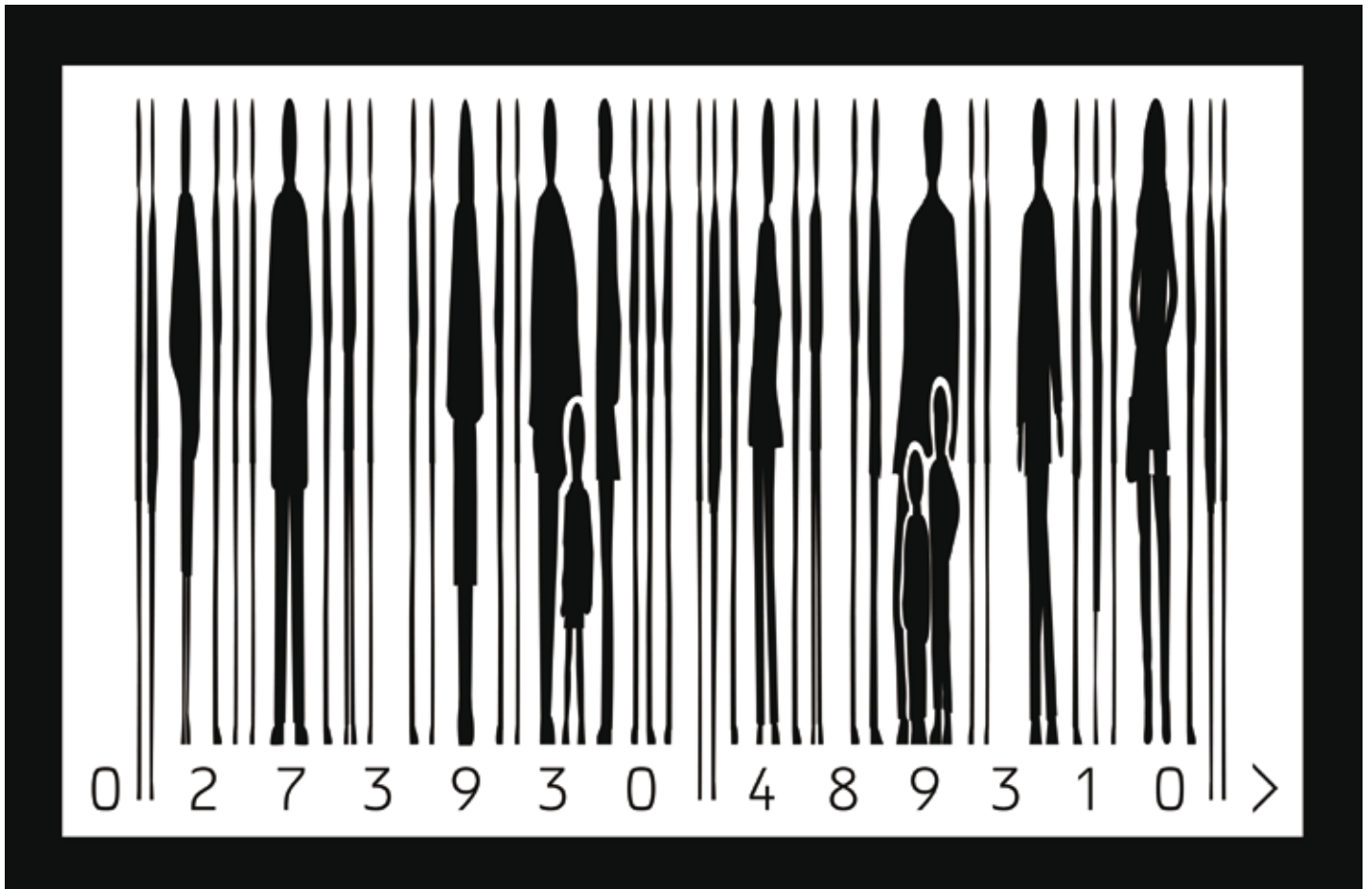
possibilities are actually endless in terms of how people can be exploited."

Jenny's full name and the location of the service need to remain confidential for security reasons. The fight against trafficking is dangerous business. That may sound a bit over the top, but what we're talking about here is a \$30 billion-a-year industry, according to the United Nations. A lot of criminals are making a lot of money out of the trade of human beings, so it's fair to say that The Salvation Army's move to protect the victims of this insidious crime will be opposed by those who perpetrate it.

According to the UN, around 2.5 million people are trafficked every year; 80% of them women and children. They are either forcefully removed from their homes, sold by their relatives or tricked by traffickers who promise them well-paying jobs in far-off cities or countries. They soon learn the truth when they are forced to work for little or no pay.

Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, says: "Human trafficking is a booming international trade, making billions of dollars at the expense of millions of victims, many of

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them children, who are robbed of their dignity and freedom. Although most of us have never witnessed this crime, it happens every day all around the world.”

It’s not known how many people are trafficked in Australia every year. A recent government report concluded that more research is needed and highlighted the difficulty in obtaining statistics due to the clandestine nature of the trade.

The UN also recognises this as a problem, adding that all too often victims are mistakenly treated as illegal immigrants.

Jenny says there are more people in enslavement in Australia than what the authorities believe.

“I’m comfortable saying there are thousands, but I don’t have any research to back it up. So we really need to have a research project that looks at the full scope of the problem. And I think it will tell us that there are thousands.”

Jenny is an expert in her field. She’s worked for the past 10 years in anti-trafficking programs in the United States, long before the issue became a focus for activist groups or the international community – UN.GIFT, the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, was set up just last year.

As a co-founder of the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) in Los Angeles, Jenny has worked as a case manager and advocate for survivors of human trafficking and slavery since 1998. In 1999, she established and administered

a model inter-agency anti-trafficking/anti-slavery task force in Los Angeles that is still running today. She advocated for the passage of the US Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 and is a founding member of Freedom Network USA, a national advocacy network.

Jenny was involved in the setting up of America’s first refuge for trafficking victims in 2003. Five years later, she’s in Australia, making history here with The Salvation Army.

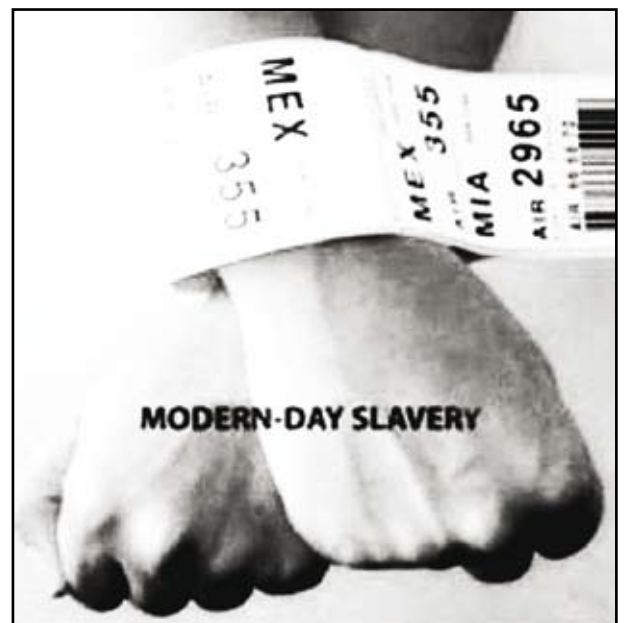
The Salvos’ safe house for trafficking victims opened its doors at the beginning of the year. It’s a 10-bed refuge where victims can stay for up to a year and receive the support and services they need to put their lives back together.

“Many trafficked people suffer from the symptoms of post-traumatic stress [disorder],” says Jenny. “They also experience anxiety, depression and can even become suicidal. They may feel lonely and sad and ashamed of what’s happened to them or blame themselves for believing the false promises of their captors. They feel the pain of not being able to see their families including spouses and children that have been left behind. If their legal status doesn’t allow them to

access work or education, boredom and lack of activity can also contribute to poor mental health. The feeling of having time stolen combined with an uncertain future means we have to help residents develop ways of coping with the stress of daily living.”

Trafficking is a global crime that has no borders; however once free from captivity, the victims then often find themselves an illegal alien in a strange country.

Jenny says most victims want to stay in Australia but she’s unhappy with the Federal Government’s visa regime for trafficked victims.



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“Right now there’s a bit of a carrot and a stick approach, whereby if you’re willing to participate in the investigation and prosecution of your slave-holders then you may get assistance. We think that cooperation [with prosecution] should not be a condition for getting assistance, so that’s something we’d like to see changed.”

Just like any other traumatic crime, victims of trafficking are often scared and don’t feel psychologically strong enough to pursue the prosecution of their captors.

“It’s a really big thing to ask someone to do, who has been potentially tortured and traumatised and suffered things that you couldn’t even imagine,” says Jenny.

“Starting over is hard enough without having to face the person who abused you in court and face interrogation from their lawyer who will try to make you look like you’re lying, stupid, or trying to manipulate the process. On top of it all, you don’t speak English ... you’re doing it all through an interpreter.”

But human trafficking is a crime and both Jenny and The Salvation Army realise that a criminal justice response is necessary in the fight against it. But they are at pains to point out that it shouldn’t be the focus. According to Jenny, the emphasis needs to be on the victim and the victim’s rights.

“No country is really implementing a human rights response. I would like to see Australia be the first to do it. Everyone talks about it, everyone knows it’s best practice but the truth is, globally the criminal justice approach is the approach that most governments are taking. We have a unique situation here in Australia because of our geography, wealth, highly developed political and social structures and we are already committed to eradicating slavery. If we implemented effective strategies and worked in collaboration at all levels of the community we could have a response that would undeniably be the best in the world.”

So while meeting the needs of victims, Jenny is also in the business of engaging governments in a human rights response and educating other agencies and non-government organisations about how to identify and care for victims.

Mahatma Ghandi once famously said: “We need to be the change we wish to see in the world.” The Salvation Army has a vision for the abolishment of the modern-day slave trade and here in Australia, it has taken the first step towards making that vision a reality. ■



HUMAN TRAFFICKING: WATCH IT

Jenny recommends the following films for people who are interested in finding out more about human trafficking:

Dying to Leave — an Australian production available at Ronin Films in Australia.

www.roninfilms.com.au

Ghosts — a British film about the enslavement and death of Chinese cockle-pickers.

www.ghoststhemovie.co.uk

Dreams Die Hard — stories of modern slavery in America

www.freetheslaves.net

Hell on Earth — Slavery today from Anti-Slavery International
www.antislavery.org/homepage/resources/videos.htm

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: READ IT

Websites to check out:

www.antislavery.org.au

www.donttradelives.com.au

www.humantrafficking.org

www.antislavery.org

www.freetheslaves.net

www.gaatw.net

www.stopthetraffik.org

Download the Australia chapter of *Collateral Damage: The Impact of Anti-Trafficking Measures on Human Rights Around the World*
www.gaatw.net

The book *Disposable People*, by Kevin Bales, is also worth reading.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: ACTION IT

Want to do something about this injustice but don't know what?

Here are a few things that Jenny at the safe-house needs:

- Dentists: Dentists are urged to contact The Salvation Army if they can offer free or discounted procedures for trafficked victims.
- Supplies for a community garden — soil, pots, herbs, seeds, plants, flowers
- Large BBQ
- Two small bistro-style tables and four bistro-style chairs
- Outdoor furniture
- Mobile phones with chargers
- Knitting supplies — needles, yarn, wool
- International phone calling cards (minimum \$10)
- Sponsorship for resident recreation and life skills activities

Call Jenny to discuss your ideas on how to help on 02 9211 5794

You can also help end trafficking by switching to fair trade chocolate, tea, coffee and other products in your home, business and organisation. Go to:
www.fairgotrading.com.au
www.fta.org.au
www.oxfamshop.org.au