



Called To Action: Jonathan Spencer '79

by Richard D. Stanley

Jonathan Spencer '79 first witnessed the terrible toll of human trafficking in the sex industry of India several years ago when he accompanied an undercover rescue operation into one of the teeming brothels in the Falkland Road red-light district of central Mumbai.

"I thought slavery was kind of done, but then I went to India and participated in some rescues," says Spencer. "It's an eye-opener. In 1850, the cost of a slave in today's dollars was the equivalent of \$40,000. Today, in India, a girl is sold into the sex trade for as little as \$90.

"India is the epicenter of human trafficking and, according to the United Nations, it is the most dangerous place in the world to be a girl or woman," he says. "There are about 2 million girls caught up in this in India, with 200,000 new girls being dragged into it each year. Some of these girls are as young as 8 and 20 percent of the workers are under the age of 16. And every one of these girls is someone's daughter."

India is the epicenter of human trafficking and, according to the United Nations, it is the most dangerous place in the world to be a girl or woman.

Spencer, an engineer by trade, shared his story while on campus in April. He visited Allegheny to help judge the 9th Annual Gator Social Venture Challenge, a competition that allows student entrepreneurs to pitch ideas for a new social venture. He spoke separately about human trafficking to students and staff in the Grounds for Change coffee shop.

Spencer told the gathering that the young women caught in the web of sex slavery often are locked in their rooms. One girl relayed that she hadn't been outside or seen daylight in almost three years. "Many become resigned that this is their fate," he says.

Authorities occasionally raid a brothel and move the girls to safe houses. Spencer, who originally went to India years ago to work with a group providing education and vocational training to

village children, accompanied one of these raids as an observer after hearing about the conditions in which sex trafficking victims are held.

"There is a critical need for after-care services for the girls who are rescued. They need to rebuild their lives. The government provides a safe house for a couple of weeks, but then the girls are let out and the majority of them, with no other options available, end up back in the sex trade," says Spencer.

Being a father himself, Spencer was moved to act.

He has formed a nonprofit agency, New Horizons House, which is constructing a small campus in the southeastern state of Andhra Pradesh in India. "We feel we can make a huge difference there," says Spencer, who is the organization's president and chief executive officer. "We aren't directly involved in the rescues. Our focus is on relocating, restoring and reintegrating the girls."

New Horizons House will provide trauma care, educational opportunities, counseling and vocational training. Property was recently purchased, architectural plans have been drawn up and the plan is for the facility to be staffed and operating in early 2016. Ultimately, up to 80 girls between the ages of 12 and 16 will live there and will attend classes daily, says Spencer, who was a math major at Allegheny.

"The residential facility will nourish each girl's physical, spiritual and emotional well-being," says Spencer, "and allow her not just to survive the past but to thrive with a renewed sense of dignity and purpose." 🙏

New Horizons House is based in Littleton, CO.
newhorizonshouse.org
(800) 727-6689
Jonathan's email is jrs@newhorizonshouse.org