

# Annual Report 2015-2016



FREEDOM FIRM  
RESCUE | RESTORATION | JUSTICE



## SIGNIFICANT HAPPENINGS

389

women and girls rescued from brothels and now somewhere on the spectrum between bondage and freedom.

cases filed against numerous traffickers

150

9 sentenced to prison for their crimes.

Judgement of the PIL laid guidelines to prevent the misuse of bail in Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA)

347 girls have taken part in the Avalanche camp since its inception

girls have participated in the LEG UP PROGRAM and been a part of the Ooty aftercare PROGRAM

64

# Celebrating 10 Years of Freedom

# Celebrating 10 years of Freedom

*"We celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Freedom Firm this year and I am encouraged with what has been accomplished." Greg Malstead, National Director, Freedom Firm*

On May 1st, 2006 Mala and I were nearing the end of an exciting though sometimes frustrating process of naming our new organization. We began with a long list of potential names and then slowly checked them off the list as it became clear that a particular name wasn't right.

Mala wrote in an email to our future colleagues ... *"The only name that has really sparked an interest in both of us is Freedom Firm. Freedom is the opposite of bondage and slavery, which is what the girls experience on many levels, physical, spiritual, emotional. And when a girl is rescued from the brothel, she is freed physically... according to her choice she can experience freedom on other levels as well and that is our hope for her. I feel the word "freedom", best describes our work.*

*It encapsulates the intervention and rescue, and it describes our work in the rehab home too- the journey towards emotional and spiritual freedom. Freedom from hatred (forgiveness). Freedom from injustice. Freedom from abuse. Freedom from addictions."*

And so our vision was given a name and 10 years later more than 350 women and girls have been rescued from brothels and are now somewhere on the spectrum between bondage and freedom. More than 140 cases have been filed against numerous traffickers and 9 have been sentenced to prison for their crimes. So what is next? After 10 years of rescue, restoration, and justice; what happens next?

In the last 10 years, we've

witnessed a dramatic reduction in child sex-trafficking in places like Kolhapur, Pune, Sangli, Miraj, Nashik and Nagpur. Police, courts and welfare departments in those cities are better equipped, more responsive and sensitized to the issue of trafficking. What will happen in the next 10 years? How many more towns and cities will be added to that list?

At Freedom Firm, we need to keep pushing the boundaries. Keep going to the places where no one else has gone. Before our team found minor girls in Wani and Mul and Pratapgarh, I didn't even know those places existed! Evidently there are 68 villages in the remote districts of Neemach, Mandasaur, and Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh where minor girls are forced into prostitution by their own families. Freedom Firm is already there, conducting investigations and rescues.

How many more villages, towns,

highway dhaba's and roadside hotels are out there? The challenge of India is that it is vast, in geography and in population.

My hope and prayer is that the work of Freedom Firm will continue; that more young women will experience release from bondage and that more traffickers will be held to account. We celebrate the 10th anniversary of Freedom Firm and I am encouraged with what has been accomplished. I look forward to the next 10 years with great expectation and hope for what will come.



*The photo was taken by Satyajeeet on a raid in Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh in December 2015. The photo won first place in a photography contest held for staff at Freedom Firm.*



# The Mission

## Rescue, Restoration and Justice

Freedom Firm seeks to eliminate child prostitution in India by rescuing minor girls, providing effective rehabilitation and prosecuting the perpetrators of sex trafficking.

### Rescue

Freedom Firm undercover operatives locate minor girls in brothels and document the crime. This information is then reported to the police. The Freedom Firm team, along with the police, raid the brothels, rescue the girls and arrest the brothel keepers and traffickers. The rescued girls are then placed in government remand homes and Freedom Firm files criminal complaints against their oppressors.

### Restoration

Freedom Firm's social workers partner with shelter homes across the country to provide rescued girls with counselling, therapy, job training, education and health care. The creative program includes a summer camp, animal therapeutic activities with partner organisation Leg Up, and employment with business Ruhamah Designs to help the girls grow in confidence and independence.

### Justice

Freedom Firm actively pursues the conviction of those responsible for trafficking minor girls. Freedom Firm lawyers assist public prosecutors at each stage of the criminal trial. Rescued girls are empowered to testify against their abusers and to help bring them to justice. Every trial and every conviction creates a deterrent and raises the cost of sex trafficking in India.

“ Freedom Firm seeks to eliminate child prostitution in India by rescuing minor girls, providing effective rehabilitation and prosecuting the perpetrators of sex trafficking.

”

# Rescue: Applying Pressure

## Biggest raid in Allahabad's red-light area: Police find 125 women in 5-hour long search operation to bust sex trade

May 2, 2016 the newspaper headlines announced what essentially resulted in the closure of the red-light area Meerghat, in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh. After

only one and a half years of Freedom Firm presence in this city, we found ourselves with some surprising results. Over the course of that time Freedom Firm conducted numerous investigations and gathered information about minor girls in prostitution. On multiple occasions we approached the police to conduct rescue operations. We experienced the full range of response, from active cooperation to downright hostility and even threats to

our staff. On 5 occasions the police cooperated and 10 minor girls and young women were rescued (one girl was rescued twice). Five First Information Reports (FIRs) were

filed and 8 brothel keepers and customers arrested.

Was this enough to cause the police to close down the entire red-light area? For several decades this red-light area thrived as a place of prostitution; Freedom Firm was not the first organization to rescue girls and arrest traffickers, why did the police act so decisively this time?

Part of the answer probably lies in a PIL filed by a local advocate, asking the administration to relocate the red-light areas from Meerghat to a place outside the city.

Perhaps the answer lies more in the pressure applied by Freedom Firm over the course of the preceding 18 months.

We are grateful that Allahabad's red-light area is closed for business. Women and girls are not being exploited like before. It may not have happened the way we expected, but we are glad for this incredible change in Allahabad.

## 18 Months of Pressure



# Restoration: Fighting for the girls

*"In the court, they laughed at us, argued we should have no basis to speak, and even threatened our team." Evan Henck, Regional Director, Freedom Firm.*

Freedom Firm's first rescue in Allahabad really surprised us. We had been expecting to encounter significant opposition to the rescue and protection of minor girls. Instead after Kirti was rescued in January, she remained in protective custody and the brothel keeper remained behind bars for more than three months. In some ways, we were lulled into a sense of comfort and confidence. Then, in April we learned that our confidence was premature.

It took over two months to accomplish the second rescue in Allahabad; and that in spite of having a letter in hand from the most senior police in the capital city. When the girls were finally rescued, we assumed the procedure would go along the lines of Kirti's rescue. Instead, the girls were kept in the police station for 6 nights in violation of well established rules and then released to relatives.

When our team returned for rescue in May, we were sobered and ready. They responded quick-

ly. Three girls were rescued, but again kept in the police station. By this time, our legal team had identified a new local advocate who was willing to fight alongside us. He and his team approached the court repeatedly, over the course of a week, with application after application seeking to protect the girls. We wanted them released from the police station and put in a shelter home. We wanted an inquiry conducted into their family and history. When their medical results gave their age above 18, we wanted them re-tested.

As we fought day after day in the court, opposition formed as the protestors arrived from the red light area. They found advocates. In the court, they laughed at us, argued we should have no basis to speak, and even threatened our team. Five men followed our staff around Allahabad for five days. Back in the court, the Chief Judicial Magistrate must have got tired of having pressure from both sides, so he simply transferred the

case to another judge. The new judge, a woman, was patient, understanding and considerate of the girls. Still, we worried she might be pressured to release them. One of our local advocates stood outside her office until she finished her order to ensure that the brothel keepers could not meet her without being seen. They didn't show their faces and the judge ordered that the girls be sent to a shelter home. A panel of five people were called to make recommendations on the girls' care and protection. There is more work to be done but we are happy to be fighting for these girls.

“  
Instead, the girls were kept in the police station for 6 nights, in violation of well established rules, and then released to relatives.  
”



# Justice: Strengthening the Law

## *Final Orders in Public Interest Litigation*

Freedom Firm celebrates the outcome of the Public Interest Litigation that was filed in the Bombay High Court in 2013. The final order directed the Commissioner of Police, Pune to set up a team under a Special Police Officer to continue the vigil against the accused in the 42 cases reported in the Public Interest Litigation. Future cases must be monitored and documented to ensure that accused cannot abscond.

The Court expects the Commissioner of Police and his (staff) "to work in unison to combat the evil of trafficking and free the most vulnerable section of our society from such evil" and failing which to hand over the task of obtaining the presence of the accused who are traffickers from the neighbouring countries to the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation)

The Times of India reported the outcome of this P.I.L.

source: <http://www.mumballocal.net/author/admin/>



Bombay High Court and University Campus

26 NOVEMBER 2015

## THE TIMES OF INDIA

*"Not being trafficked is a fundamental right of every Indian citizen, the only provision in the chapter on fundamental rights which appears to be completely forgotten," said the judges, adding, "The bane of trafficking cases is granting of injudicious bail and once that is granted, the road to slip away is open to the accused. Bail should be denied to habitual offenders (traffickers), except upon exceptional, special and compelling reasons upon the most stringent conditions."*

## Highlights 2016



# Freedom Camps

*"Do the thing you fear the most and the death of fear is certain." Mark Twain*

After nine years of wilderness camps in the mountains near Ooty, Tamil Nadu India, government changes to forest access meant Freedom Firm held camps in the city of Bangalore for the first time. Bumped out of our comfort zone and forced to embrace the concrete jungle, it's no surprise that we were stretched and flexed in a myriad of new ways.



*Day 1 - Gathering together over thousands of miles*

**Day One:** 41 people gather from across the world, 8 from America, 25 rescued girls from different shelter homes and 4 chaperone staff and 4 staff from Freedom Firm. This year we all converged in Bangalore, for our 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Freedom Camps hosted by Freedom Firm.

This is a day of orientation, both for staff and girls, and icebreaker games to help break down barriers. With 3 to 4 languages represented, basic communication is a challenge! Our American friends learn to communicate through Freedom Firm staff, who provide interpretation.

**Day Two:** Warming Up! We go out on the town for a time of pure fun, lots of activities and low pressure as we get to know each other in a relaxed setting.

**Day Three:** We get into the meat of the camp. The US team teaches daily workshops on subjects like hygiene, mental health, identity, worth, and friendship through a variety of hands-on activities, story books, drama, and demonstrations. We also start the low ropes course that stretch and challenge each girl's trust of the ropes and the other participants. If fear has a scale of one to ten, the low ropes focus on factors 1-3. This is a day of preparation for greater challenges the next day.

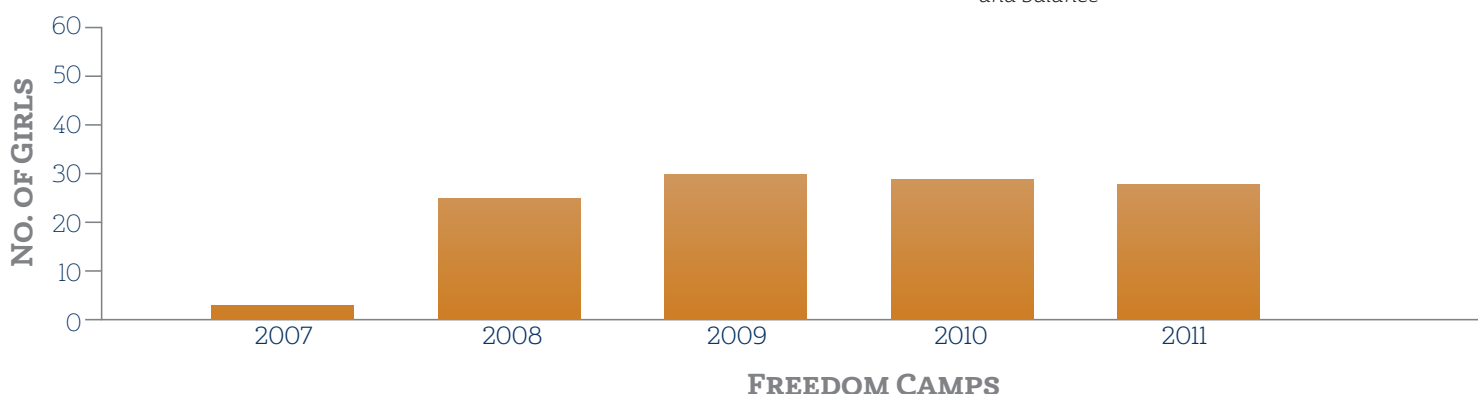
Each day of camp is filled with Jazzercise, fabulous crafts, games and a "campfire" time at the end of the day.



*Day 2 - Warming up with a minnows pedicure*



*Day 3 -Low ropes course, we spot each other as we risk footing and balance*







*(Day 3) How long do germs take to destroy- First lesson of the camp is hygiene*



*Day 4 - Testing our trust on the 35 foot high ropes*

**Day Four:** The high ropes course is the exhilarating, difficult challenge of the day. 35 feet high, with several ropes to traverse before ziplining down to the ground, this activity takes 4 hours in the hot sun as each of the 49 participants, girls and staff complete each part of the challenge. Everyone in the group waits below, cheering each person on to success. It's a day of shaking limbs, tears and exuberant shouts and laughter as each person ziplines "home". In the evening, everyone debriefs after dinner in small groups. The ropes, the cheering group of supporters, the harness, all translate into analogies for real life.

**Day Five:** Girls and staff continue learning through the teaching times sprinkled throughout the day. The tunnel challenge hits the fear button for some, as girls are paired up and asked to crawl through a 50-meter tunnel on their hands and knees in the absolute dark. While there are emergency exits, they are encouraged to rely on their partners to find the way out and crawl out into the light. For some, this activity is the greatest and most difficult of the entire camp.

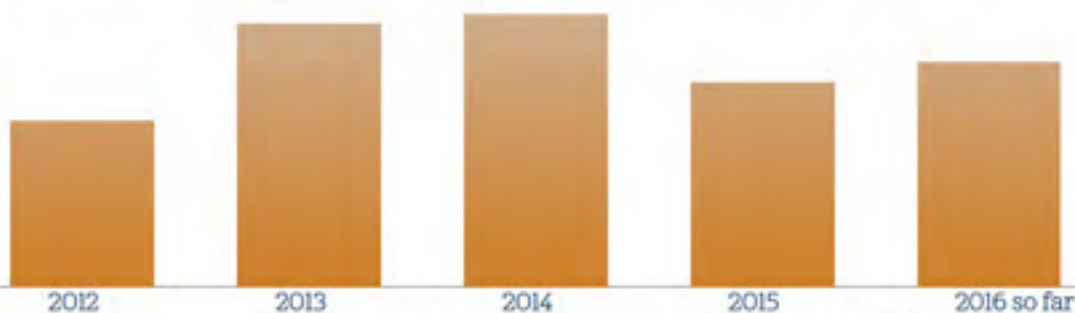


*Day 5 - Out of the tunnel and into the light!*



We are nearing the end, and everyone is exhausted from a long and exciting week. We go out for dinner at a great restaurant, give gifts, share some closing thoughts, and say our thank-yous and our goodbyes. It's sad to go, but all of our lives are somehow changed and redefined, and we see each other and ourselves in a new way. We have grown, we have overcome fears. We move forward with our heads held a little higher and the light of hope in our eyes.

*Day 5 - A gift of henna (mendhi) design for our American friends as the camp winds down and we say goodbye*



**FREEDOM CAMPS**



















# Justice contd...

## Varsha's Testimony

Freedom Firm rescued Varsha\* in June 2011. Varsha was released and re-trafficked. Fortunately, Freedom Firm's team was able to rescue her again in 2013. This time, Varsha confided to the social worker that she wanted to leave prostitution. We were thrilled to be able to advocate for her and took steps to transfer her to a better aftercare home in Mumbai. We did not realize it would be another 2 years of continuous effort and at times great difficulty for the transfer to become a reality.

Varsha's transfer order was passed in December 2015 but she was not transferred to another shelter home until February 2016, due to police unavailability. The

delay proved to be a window of opportunity for Freedom Firm. Once a girl is transferred, it is difficult to bring her back to the court to testify. In a few cases, the shelter homes refuse to send the girl to testify. When they are released to their families, their parents either don't want to send their girls to testify or are unaware that their daughters were in prostitution in the first place. Thanks to the delay in Varsha's case, our legal team was able to take advantage of the situation and request the court to summon her to testify.

The court immediately issued summons to Varsha to testify on February 18th, 2016. She testified

boldly in court, identified her brothel keeper and stated that she was forced into prostitution.

Finally, Varsha was transferred from Nagpur to a shelter home in Mumbai. She will remain safe and have the opportunity of education and vocational training at the home. We celebrate this long-awaited, next step in Varsha's journey.

*\*Name changed to protect identity*

“  
Varsha confided to the social worker that she wanted to leave prostitution.  
”



# Expansion

In 2015, Freedom Firm witnessed a dramatic reduction in minor girls in prostitution in Nagpur and Pune. This gave us the opportunity to focus on new areas.

## West India

Since the red-light area was shut down for the first half of the year in Nagpur, the team investigated other areas in the state; Wani and Koregaon (smaller towns with red-light areas) resulting in successful rescue operations.

In Koregaon, 120 kilometres from Pune, Freedom Firm's team rescued two minor girls and three major girls with the assistance of local police. Two brothel keepers

were arrested. In Wani, 130 kilometres from Nagpur two girls were rescued and three brothel keepers and two customers arrested. In Mul, 150 kilometres from Nagpur, 1 minor girl was rescued. 4 brothel keepers and 1 customer were arrested. In Gadchiroli, 138 kilometres from Nagpur, 2 minors and 4 borderline girls were rescued. 6 brothel keepers were arrested.

## Central India

In Madhya Pradesh, the team conducted six successful rescue operations in Ratlam, Mandasaur, and Neemuch resulting in the rescue of 12 minors, 2 borderline and 7 majors from prostitution.

## North India

In Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, 70 kilometres from Delhi, 10 minors were rescued and 3 brothel keepers arrested in two raids done in April and June.

## South India

In January 2016, Freedom Firm received solid information from two customers detailing the location of a lodge with photographs of two girls trapped in prostitution in Salem, Tamil Nadu 215 kilometres from Ooty. Freedom Firm staff travelled to Salem and launched a raid with the support of police authorities and rescued both girls from prostitution. A total of 4 accused were arrested.

## Freedom Firm Rescue Operations



“ ... the team conducted six successful rescue operations in Ratlam, Mandasaur, and Neemuch resulting in the rescue of 12 minors, 2 borderline and 7 majors from prostitution. ”

### KEY:

- ◆ Areas where girls were rescued before April 2015
- Areas where girls were rescued between April 2015 - June 2016

# Ruhamah Designs

'I'm going to start a new life', said one of the trainees in a Ruhamah Designs training program at Mundhwa Home in Mumbai. The response of the girls was overwhelming after we introduced ourselves as staff from Ruhamah Designs, a business that employs and trains survivors of sex trafficking in jewelry designs. Victims of trafficking are sent to state run shelter homes after their rescue but are seldom given an opportunity to pursue another vocation during their stay in the home. This makes them vulnerable when they are released to their parents or enter mainstream society.

Ten girls attended the training; all aged between twenty to thirty years of age, all signifying so much potential. Their response to our invitation to be trained was exciting. I was thrilled. There was

so much we could do and many ways in which we could impact the lives of these girls.

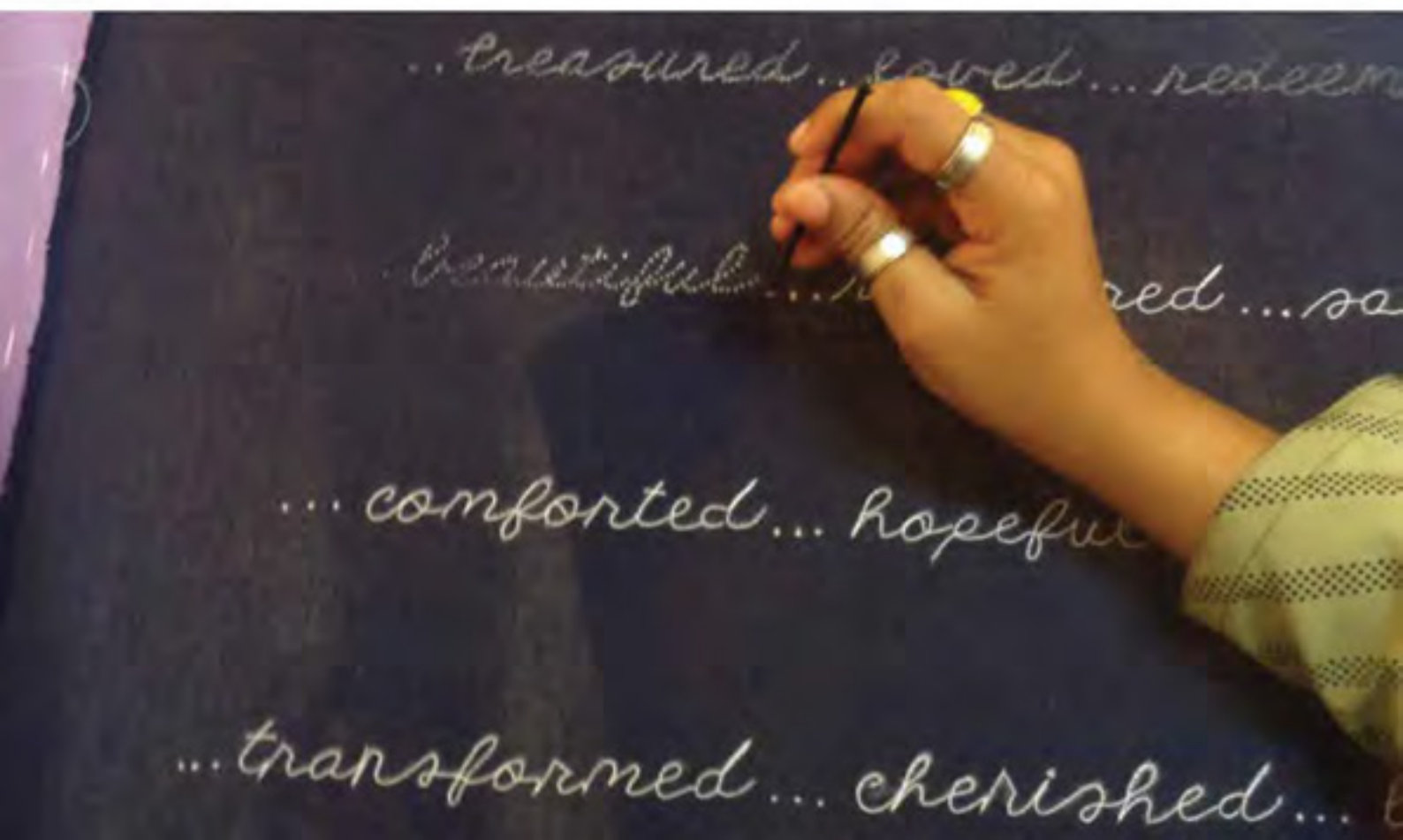
Over the course of the training, which lasted a month, the girls slowly gained confidence in their new work. Aarti\* an artisan at Ruhamah Designs, also a survivor of sex trafficking, shared her inspiring story of how she is able to save money and support her family. Aarti not only encouraged the girls with her story of real life outside the government remand home, but also passed on her expertise in jewelry making to the girls. Survivors training other survivors!

The girls began production in July and are now creating earrings and are trained in life skills that will help them as they transition into society.

For the girls at Mundhwa it is a beginning, a fresh start. It is a beginning for me too. A time when I have the opportunity to invest in the lives of women, who were cheated, never given a chance to excel and to train them in what will be their second lives. An opportunity that I cannot miss.

*[Rani, is Ruhamah's workshop manager in Pune]*

“ Their response to our invitation to be trained was exciting. The girls were full of enthusiasm every day. ”



# Sony's Fire

*Our hearts grieve you  
The loss of your fine mind,  
spirit, and frame,  
now the shroud of one  
that waited to be born.  
This was your willing suttee\*.*

*What despair  
consumed your heart  
to pour liquid oil,  
to light the match  
to ignite your body,  
a living funeral pyre,  
for a husband's crime?  
Your frame fueled a fire  
so great  
nothing could quench it,  
drench it.*

*Your inward rage met  
an outward flame  
and together  
they burned for a  
man's disgrace.  
The waste, inconceivable  
the loss, irrevocable.*

*What good  
can come of your ashes?*

*You rest now  
with your Saviour  
In His arms lay your head  
cradle your little one  
all betrayals finished.  
The legacy of violence  
against your body  
by others,  
by you  
is over.  
Sony, rest.*

**Mala Malstead**

\*suttee - the former Hindu practice of a widow throwing herself on to her husband's funeral pyre.



Sony was rescued from a brothel in Pune 2009. She spent several years in a shelter home in Mumbai. In 2013 she joined the newly launched Kolkata Ruhamah Designs workshop. One of the first employees, smart and adept, she learned the ancient Indian tradition of Aari and created beautiful embroidered designs. She worked for two years with us before she met a young man and wanted to get married. Since he was a known "gundah" (hired thug), Freedom Firm staff urged her to forget about him. Sony married him anyway, and she left the job shortly after. A year went by, and we heard Sony was pregnant. She lived with her parents, since his family refused to accept her claiming "she was a bad woman."

Sony told our social worker, Koj, that she wanted to return to work. She even planned to attend the Avalanche Camp in Bangalore in April. Early in March Sony came back to Ruhamah Designs. She worked just four days and then suddenly stopped. Staff were unable to reach her by phone to discover the reason for her absence. Then on the 17th of March after a late night fight with her husband, Sony poured kerosene over herself and lit a match. Her husband and parents rushed her to the hospital. With 3rd degree burns over 95% of her body, doctors knew Sony would not recover. Four months pregnant, she lost her baby within a few hours of the incident and Sony died a few days later..

Here is what her co-workers in the Kolkata workshop say:

**Sagorika:** Sony had a free spirit; she loved dressing up. When I heard she was having a baby I was so happy for her. When I went to visit her home she gave me fruit from her tree to eat. I miss eating lunch with her.

**Tumpa:** Whenever I forgot to bring my lunch, Sony would give me her own.

**From Freedom Firm Staff:**

**Zeenat (Kolkata workshop manager):** Sony was with Ruhamah Designs from the day the workshop started. I will miss her sweet and caring personality.

**Koj (social worker, Kolkata):** Sony influenced the most rebellious person in the workshop (who also happens to hate dressing up) to wear a sari.

**Catherine (CEO Ruhamah Designs):** Sony was a petite, young woman, with an expressive face that shared every emotion: agreement, disagreement, anger and love. Sony wanted desperately to be accepted. Sony was sensitive, active and quick to learn, I miss her.

# Leg Up: Gaining Confidence

*“I learn to keep myself safe just like the horses know how to keep themselves safe.” Riya.*

Leg Up, the horse therapy program, has deeply impacted the lives of four young women, all employees of Ruhamah Designs, who live in Ooty, Tamil Nadu. This year, as they worked through the first level of Parelli Horse Training Curriculum, they learned to motivate, control and teach the horses through games and the “join-up” activity in the round pen. By training the horses, each woman grew personally.

**Lydia** says, *“The Leg Up program helped me to calm down and to lower my stress. Horses can sense emotions. I’ve learned how to behave, that horses are different and so are people, and I know now how to respond better to people.”*

**Kamna** gave her feedback too; *“Before I was scared by the horses’ behavior. I learned that I shouldn’t be afraid and to know who is in control. Leg Up gives me the desire to help other physically disabled children.”*

**Kiruba** says, *“I have learned to be patient and its made me confident in what I do. Sometimes when I am stressed out , horse therapy helps to calm me.”*

**Riya** explains, *“Leg Up helps me keep my body fit and I learn to control the horse. I learn to keep myself safe just like the horses know how to keep themselves safe.”*

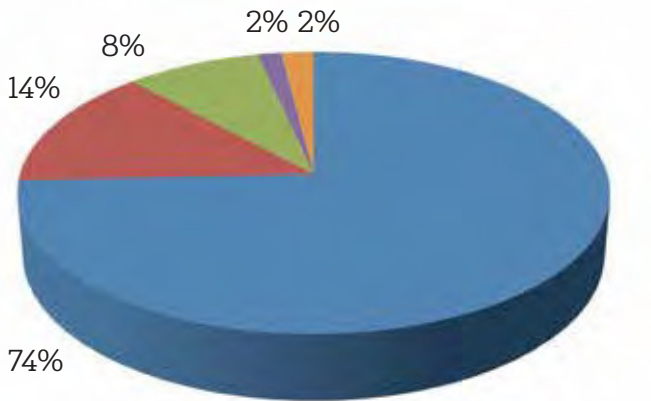


# Funding

Freedom Firm's total income for the year was Rs. 21013337 or \$ 350222 (46% more than the last year's income of Rs. 14,375,998 or \$ 239,600) Our sources of income were grants given through Freedom Firm USA, direct grants from donors in Europe, USA, and India.

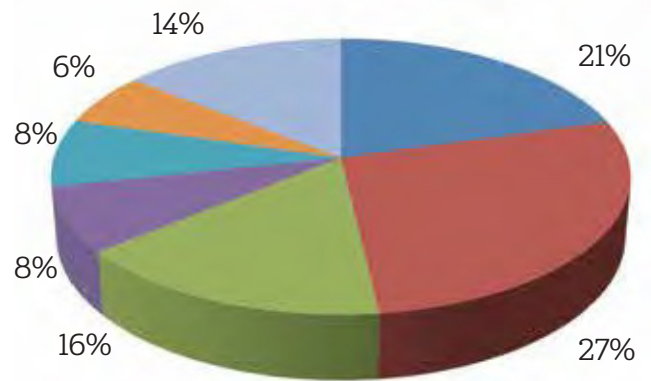
We simply could not have achieved all that we did without the generous support of individuals, foundations and churches from across the world. Thank you to everyone who contributed to Freedom Firm and allowed us to expand our work of rescue, restoration and justice for victims of sex trafficking in India!

Income in INR: 21014837.42



- Freedom Firm USA (From grants received)
- Free a Girl
- Tearfund
- Alongside Asia
- India

Expenditure in INR: 16134547.88



- Rescue
- Restoration
- Justice
- Leg Up
- West Bengal
- Avalanche/Freedom Camps
- Operations + Communications

## Grants from Foundations and Churches that funded our operations in 2015-16

### Grants received through Freedom Firm USA

First Fruits  
 Freedom 4/24  
 Grace Evangelical Church  
 Grace Church, North Carolina  
 Individual Donors  
 Mary Lynn Foundation  
 Memorial Park  
 Murthy Nayak Foundation  
 One Days Wages  
 Project Dance  
 Woodsedge Church  
 Maclellan

### Other Grants

Alongside Asia

Free A Girl (Netherlands)  
 Tearfund (UK)

To continue giving, please visit our website:  
[www.freedom.firm.in](http://www.freedom.firm.in) for online donations.

If you wish to send donations by cheque, please send them either to:

### In the US

Freedom Firm USA  
 P.O. Box 6440,  
 Elgin,  
 IL 60121

*(Freedom Firm USA is a US registered non-profit 501 (c) (3) Tax ID: 20-5280075. All donations are tax-deductible for US taxpayers.)*

### In India

Freedom Firm  
 78/85, Indu Sadan, Glenrock,  
 Ooty - 643 001, Tamil Nadu  
*(Freedom Firm is a registered trust in India approved under section 80G(5)(vi) of the Income Tax Act, 1961. All donations are tax-deductible for Indian taxpayers)*

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