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HOW TRUCKERS ARE BREAKING THE CHAINS OF SEX SLAVERY

December 21, 2015 By Elizabeth Geraci

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"Thank you, thank you from a survivor for this exhibit. I was so moved on so many levels by the truck and the words and the artifacts. I'm just in awe, and I'm not saying that lightly."

—Windie Lazenko, sex trafficking survivor and founder of 4Her

To many girls and women, the world is a dark prison of sex trafficking. And once they're in it, it's hard to break out.

Fortunately, Truckers Against Trafficking is doing its part to curb sex trafficking in the United States. It helps through education, law enforcement training—and the Freedom Drivers Project, a mobile exhibit raising awareness about domestic sex trafficking.

At first glance, CDL truck drivers may walk past the FDP trailer when they see it at a truck show and laugh nervously. But once they take the time to walk through it, they emerge forever changed.

"Inside the Freedom Drivers Project, I can see them start absorbing the reality of the issue," says FDP Director Helen Van Dam. "I am watching their mental shift from 'She's a prostitute' to 'She's a trafficking survivor.' It's really encouraging, and it's why I do my job."
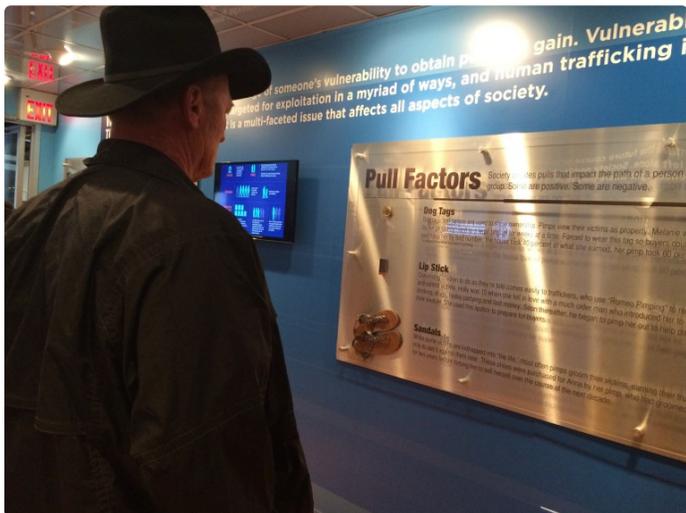
The Freedom Drivers Project is generating awareness, bit by bit, one person at a time. Since it began touring at the 2014 Great American Trucking Show, the exhibit has seen 9,100 viewers in more than 19 states.

The Freedom Drivers Project is driven around the country by various CDL truck drivers, who are advocating for Truckers Against Trafficking more each day. Jason Imhoff, a company driver for Walmart, drove the Freedom Drivers Project 1,300 miles, from Denver to Cincinnati, last July.

"As soon as I got on the interstate, people would look and point at the trailer," he recalls. "That's the best part of the Freedom Drivers Project. It brings attention to one of the worst crimes in the country."

Adding to the project's authenticity are artifacts donated by sex trafficking survivors: a woman's bed number tag from a Nevada brothel. A pair of shoes a woman wore when she was sold. The mirror two girls used to practice stripping.

This isn't Bangkok. These are the painful reminders of lives lost to sex trafficking right here in America.

"We're not talking about statistics," Van Dam says. "We are talking about real women, real individuals. These stories move people and bring them to a deeper level of understanding."

According to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 4,168 new human trafficking cases were reported to its hotline through Sept. 30 of this year. Of those calls, 3,093 focused on sex trafficking.

Imhoff wants the world to take a stronger stand against sex trafficking. "The thing is, people not only need to talk about it, they need to be the difference and bring awareness to the world," he says.

He encourages others with CDL driver jobs to contact Truckers Against Trafficking and learn how they can help. Be vigilant, he says, and display the TAT sticker on your truck.

"Everyone has a role to play, and everyone can play a role, however small or large it may be," Van Dam emphasizes.

Learn how to get involved at www.truckersagainsttrafficking.org. See something out of the ordinary? Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888).

Want a CDL driver job that helps you change the world, too? Visit Drive My Way today. It's free!

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About Elizabeth Geraci

Elizabeth Geraci, Drive My Way's brand engagement manager, is a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. An award-winning reporter, Geraci's editorial career spans everything from magazines to websites.

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