

Annual Report 2008–2009

Ooty, Pune, Mumbai, India - Hopkins, U.S.A. - Hildenborough, U.K.



*Rescue, Restoration, and Justice
for Victims of Sex Trafficking*

Annual Report 2008-2009

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The Story of Freedom Firm

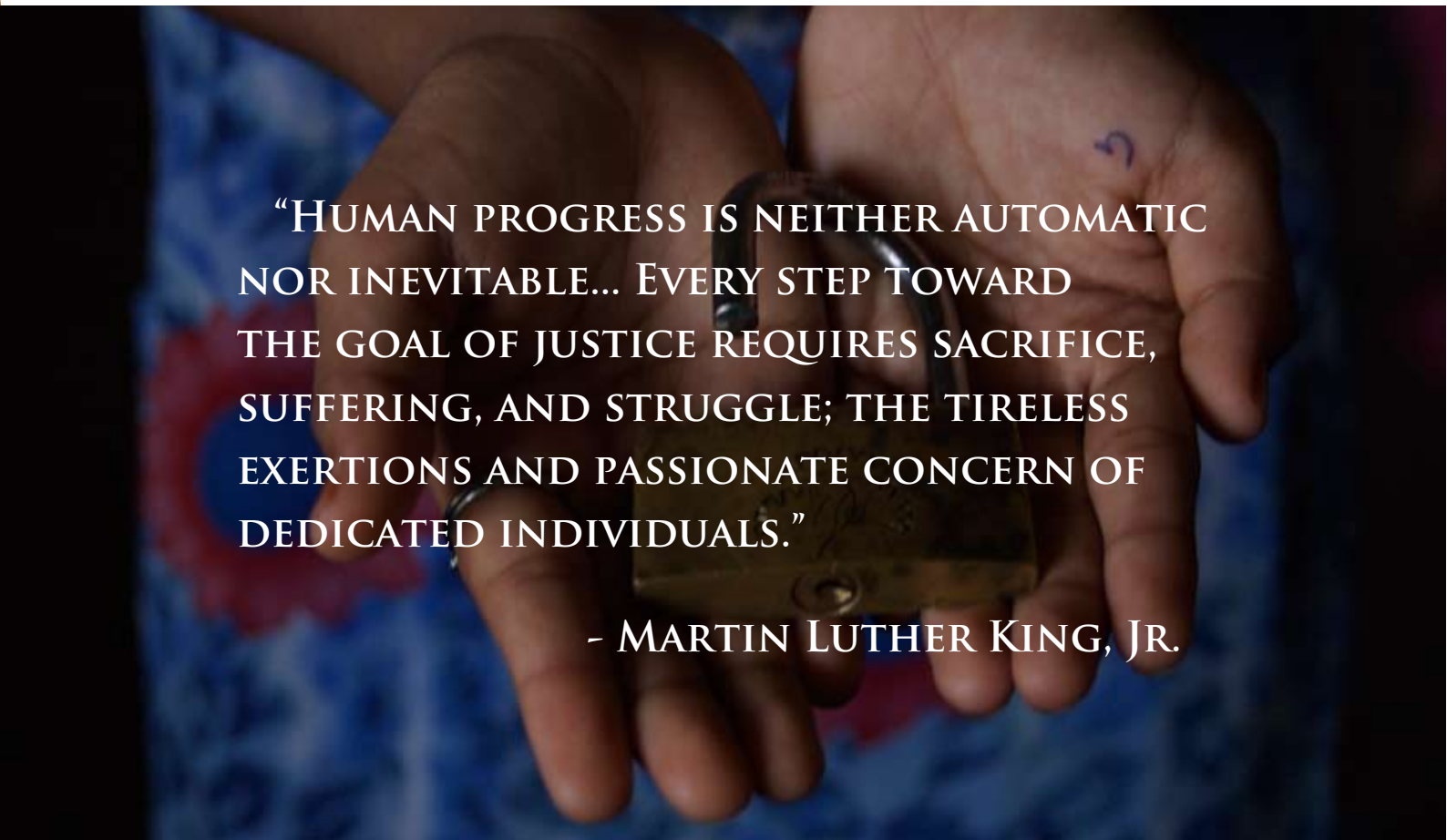
It was 2000 when Freedom Firm Co-Founders Greg and Mala Malstead moved their family to Mumbai, India, and Greg became Director of International Justice Mission, Mumbai. An attorney, Greg established IJM's first India office and built a team of investigators, lawyers, and social workers who partnered with local authorities to bring rescue and justice to victims of sex trafficking. In his five years with IJM, Greg led and participated in interventions that resulted in the rescue of over 450 victims, prosecution of more than 180 perpetrators, and conviction in 6 groundbreaking cases.

Despite this success in rescue and justice, the Malsteads wanted to do more for victims of the sex trade. Combining Greg's legal expertise with Mala's creative passion and teaching background, they envisioned an organization that not only rescues girls and brings their perpetrators to justice but also restores these girls to lives of physical, emotional, and spiritual wholeness and equips them for a future of self-reliance. The vision was to target other cities in the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka that as yet had no major NGO (non-government organization) presence. But they needed help.

The Malsteads contacted attorney Glen Parks and his wife Rebecca, two friends who were eager to share their expertise and vision and willing to move half way around the world. So in 2006, the Malsteads and the Parks founded Freedom Firm in Ooty, Tamil Nadu.

Freedom Firm's investigation team was soon on the ground in Maharashtra rescuing minor girls, while the aftercare program began to take shape in Ooty. The holistic program includes a family-style aftercare home as well as counseling, health care, education, and job training in our micro enterprise jewelry business. Also as part of aftercare, Freedom Firm has developed an Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Program (EAGL), called Leg Up, which incorporates the use of horses in building trust and self-confidence.

Since 2006, Freedom Firm has rescued over 70 underage girls from commercial sexual exploitation and is actively involved in restoring these girls to lives of wholeness and self-sufficiency. As supporters, you are a vital part of our history and our future. Thank you for sharing our vision.



“HUMAN PROGRESS IS NEITHER AUTOMATIC
NOR INEVITABLE... EVERY STEP TOWARD
THE GOAL OF JUSTICE REQUIRES SACRIFICE,
SUFFERING, AND STRUGGLE; THE TIRELESS
EXERTIONS AND PASSIONATE CONCERN OF
DEDICATED INDIVIDUALS.”

- MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

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.

The Strategy

Rescue: Undercover operatives find minor girls, document the crime, and report to the police. With assistance from Freedom Firm, the police raid brothels and rescue girls, who are then placed in aftercare. At the same time, the police arrest and file criminal complaints against the perpetrators.

Restoration: Freedom Firm's aftercare home provides rescued girls with job training, education, counseling, and health care in a safe, family-type setting. The home offers animal therapy, micro enterprises, and other creative means to help the girls heal, grow, and become independent. In addition, Freedom Firm partners with other rehabilitation homes in India.

Justice: Freedom Firm lawyers aggressively pursue convictions by assisting public prosecutors at each stage of the criminal trial. Rescued girls testify against their abusers, helping bring them to justice. Each conviction raises the cost of sex trafficking, creating a deterrent.



“Usma confided to me that she had always prayed that one day she would get to sit on a horse. God answered her prayer that day. We trotted the horse a bit, and she jostled from her head to her toes – and let out the most delighted ‘Wheeee!’ squeal ever.”

– Anne Walters, Horse Therapy Coordinator



Dear Friends,

As Freedom Firm moves into its fourth year of operation I am aware of how much we have to celebrate!

Over the course of the last three years Freedom Firm has conducted investigations in more than 18 towns and cities in Maharashtra and Karnataka, secured the release of more than 100 girls, initiated

prosecutions against more than 30 traffickers, achieved convictions of two brothel keepers in December 2008 and August 2009, and opened an aftercare home for rescued girls in Ooty, Tamil Nadu.

Freedom Firm now has a fully functioning office in Pune, Maharashtra, where nine full-time staff implement our investigative, rescue, prosecution, and regional aftercare strategies. As of June, 2009, Deborah Walker has taken the position of Director in Pune and leads the growing work in Maharashtra.

Shyam Kamble continues to lead our **investigation (rescue)** efforts. A change in personnel at the local police station near Pune's red-light area has not been in our favor. But Shyam is now actively engaged with Pune's Crime Branch (an inter-jurisdictional police unit) to continue successful rescue work.

Glen Parks, along with Evan Henck in Pune, form the Freedom Firm **legal (justice)** team. They are actively pursuing more than 35 cases against brothel keepers and other traffickers. Five judgments resulted in two convictions and three acquittals. Two of the acquittals have been appealed and are pending before the Bombay High Court.

Amees, Sunayana, and Catherine comprise the **regional aftercare (restoration)** team, based in Pune. They are now able to accompany the rescue team on almost every raid which provides a better foundation for future counseling with the rescued girls. In addition to regularly meeting with girls in the government remand homes, they assist in preparing girls to testify at trial and travel extensively to visit repatriated girls.

After three years of honing and adjustment Mala has established significant stability in the **Ooty aftercare (restoration)** program. The “Roja” aftercare home is on purchased property and the plans to expand the building are well underway. Nine girls have been through the program and four girls are with us now. The jewelry making and other micro enterprise activities are proving very successful. Mala initiated a computer course as a joint project between Freedom Firm and Smyrna Fellowship Trust that has expanded rapidly and allows

rescued girls to learn alongside members of the local community. Another time of adjustment is beginning as old staff move on by the end of 2009 and new staff join Freedom Firm.

In **operations** Jayson Palm stepped into the role of Operations Manager in March 2009. He is a tremendous encouragement to all of us in Freedom Firm and is taking the organization to a new level of professionalism.

The coming year is being greeted with a sense of enthusiasm and optimism as we emerge from challenging years of development, growth, and accomplishment. Yet we know much remains to be done. As we move from organizational infancy to adolescence, we will continue to build an increasingly solid foundation, dedicate ourselves to changing lives, and ultimately to ending child prostitution in India.

A heartfelt thank you to all you who have stood by us in so many ways. We look forward to upcoming years of making a difference together.

Gratefully,

Greg Malstead



“A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.”

– Mahatma Gandhi

Rescue: Making an Impact

In 2008 and 2009, Freedom Firm conducted 29 investigations. Our undercover operatives worked with the local police who conducted raids, which led to the rescue of more than 75 girls. Most of these girls are safe and on their way to a better life.

Our current target area is Pune. The 8th largest city in India, 4.8 million people strong, is the traffickers' strategic entry point for minor girls coming from West Bengal and Bangladesh. In 2008 and 2009 we also conducted several raids in the difficult areas of Turbhe and Vashi (just outside Mumbai), expanded our investigations into the state of Karnataka, assisted a sister-NGO in Bangalore, and several rescues were the result of information from NGOs in Kolkata and Bangladesh.

Although we specifically target the rescue of minor girls, during raids Freedom Firm social workers offer freedom to majors who are being forced into prostitution. This has resulted in the rescue of more than 20 girls above the age of 18 being held against their will. Three of these rescued girls had children taken from them upon arrival to the brothel and were reunited upon rescue.



"The police can only do so much, our hands are tied by the corruption of our seniors. Please keep doing the good work you are doing; as an NGO there is no limit to what you can do. I will do my best to make sure this bar never opens for business again."

- Police Inspector, Navi Mumbai

Rescued En Route to the Brothel

On two occasions in 2009, Freedom Firm was able to rescue girls before they were forced into prostitution. On one of these incidents, information from a partner organization in Kolkata indicated that three girls were being trafficked en route to Pune by train. Researching the train schedule, Freedom Firm sent two operatives and a social worker to meet the train one stop before Pune Station. Boarding the train at 5:00 a.m., the team moved undercover through the compartments until they identified three young girls in suspicious company. Freedom Firm coordinated with the Senior Inspector who sent a team of plain-clothes officers to the station at 7:00 a.m. As the train pulled in and the suspected traffickers stepped onto the platform, they were surrounded by the Crime Branch and the Freedom Firm team. The victim girls were rescued and the traffickers arrested.

The three girls, saved from sex slavery, are Bangladeshi and had been deceived with false promises of legitimate work and marriage.

Restoration: Transition to Permanence

"We have changed, from renters to landowners. We have a long-term vision, and building infrastructure is the launching pad for that vision."

- Mala Malstead, Director of Aftercare

Freedom Firm Owns its Very First House!

The Freedom Firm aftercare home opened in late 2006 and we called it Roja, the Tamil word for rose. At first we rented a large bungalow, but we had to share part of it with some unwanted tenants and the building needed a lot of repairs. When the landlord kicked us out 18 months later, we rented another place for a few months. Finally in February of 2008, we bought a small property in the heart of Ooty town.

The new Roja sits on one-twentieth of an acre, and with a mere 400 square feet, the very size of the cottage implies "short-term stay" for the girls rather than "long-term dependence." Living in Roja isn't isolation, sequestered in a safe spot way outside of town. It means dealing with dirty buses, nosy neighbors, and tempting bellboys from the hotel next door. Freedom Firm's Roja is a place to learn, meet challenges and grow, and get back into real life.



Roja aftercare home under construction in April 2009

Horse Therapy: The Ponies Go Country



In 2008, Freedom Firm's Horse Therapy Program (Leg Up) moved onto firmer territory. For two years our ponies lived in the Director's rented back yard in the middle of town. Finding enough grass and space to keep them healthy was next to impossible. The Malsteads bought an acre of land five miles outside of Ooty, and in October they and three ponies moved to the country. Developing a riding ring, growing our own oats, and building a horse shelter is yet another clear sign that Freedom Firm is putting down roots and is here to stay.

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

- Maya Angelou

A New Day Center for Education and Job Training

In 2008, Freedom Firm's school and micro enterprise business moved to a new day center, a rented three-room building on the beautiful six-acre campus of Smyrna Fellowship Trust, a local NGO. With proper school desks, alphabet posters and classic artwork on the walls, and pretty curtains at the windows, the spacious main room of the building has been transformed into a well-appointed schoolroom. Morning classes emphasize English and math, and thanks to further partnership with Smyrna, the girls can take computer classes as well. In the adjoining room, shelves of beads and fabrics provide the backdrop for Freedom Firm's growing jewelry business, where the girls learn the intricacies of creating handmade earrings, bracelets, and necklaces, as well as silk bags and traditional aari work. These beautiful items sell at many venues across India, the U.K., and U.S.A. with the proceeds providing the girls with a good wage as well as an education in handling money.



Esther, computer program graduate

"From now on I want my life to matter and make it something really special."

- Karishma, Freedom Firm's first rescued girl on the day of the trial of her oppressor



Justice: Freedom and Victory in the Courts

A brothel keeper arrested today will not likely face a verdict in her criminal trial until two or three years from now. Because Freedom Firm investigators have been successfully taking these exploiters off the streets for three years now, the legal team is getting busier every day, and we couldn't be more excited about that!

We've seen five verdicts so far, and are actively pursuing six on-going trials and 29 other cases that are yet to come to trial. We are working closely with the public prosecutors in five locations, together aggressively seeking strong convictions.

The legal team at Freedom Firm is thrilled with two convictions out of five verdicts. Sonam Roy was caught selling 15 year old Sunita in her brothel. First, we successfully asked the court to deny her bail request. Then we worked hard at gathering the evidence, doing the legal research, and preparing the witnesses for testimony. And after all was said and done, in December 2008, justice won out. Again in August, 2009, another Freedom Firm case resulted in the conviction of a brothel keeper.

The other three verdicts were acquittals. A forty percent conviction rate is a pretty good record here in India, we are told. But, never satisfied, we have convinced the State to appeal two of the acquittals, requesting the High Court to issue convictions. The legal reasoning for the acquittals is highly suspect and ripe for appeal, as we fully explain in our memo to the government pleader at the High Court.



Sonam Roy, convicted brothel keeper

Deborah Walker, Director of Pune Region & Development

It took us three attempts to bring Sunita, a rescued girl, all the way from Calcutta to Pune to testify in court. On the final day given by the judge in September 2008, Sunita walked into the courtroom, straight off the train from Calcutta, and the defense advocate's jaw just dropped. The advocate helping with our case told me that, to his knowledge, this was the first time in Pune that a trafficked girl has shown up to testify at the trial of her accused. The defense had been confident that the girl would never show and the accused would walk free; they now were shocked and at a total loss. It turned into a conviction, and the first one of its kind in the city of Pune.

"The courts never took trafficking cases seriously until now. Before, there was never any victim witness and you can't convict the accused based solely on the police's testimony."

- Legal Advocate, Pune, suggesting that now that Freedom Firm is doing this work, convictions are possible.

One of our six core principles is Stewardship. We allocate our resources along two complementary standards – an uncompromising drive to achieve results and a responsibility to minimize cost and avoid cultural incongruities. We are diligent about our responsibility to steward finances given by donors, not just because accountability matters, but also for the sake of the girls we search for, rescue and seek to restore.

In 2008 and 2009, Freedom Firm grew from 10 to 20 staff (with plans to hire 5 more staff by early 2010), opened a new office in Pune, and expanded the Ooty aftercare program. We rely entirely on the contributions of others for our operating budget. Without your generous and sacrificial gifts, Freedom Firm would not be able to do the work we do. Thank you for believing in this work and contributing to its success.

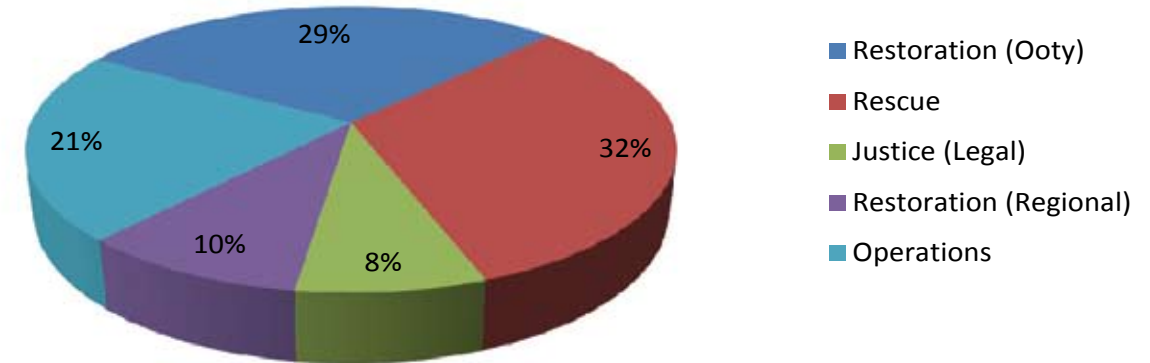


*"Knowing is not enough; we must apply.
Willing is not enough; we must do."
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Expenses

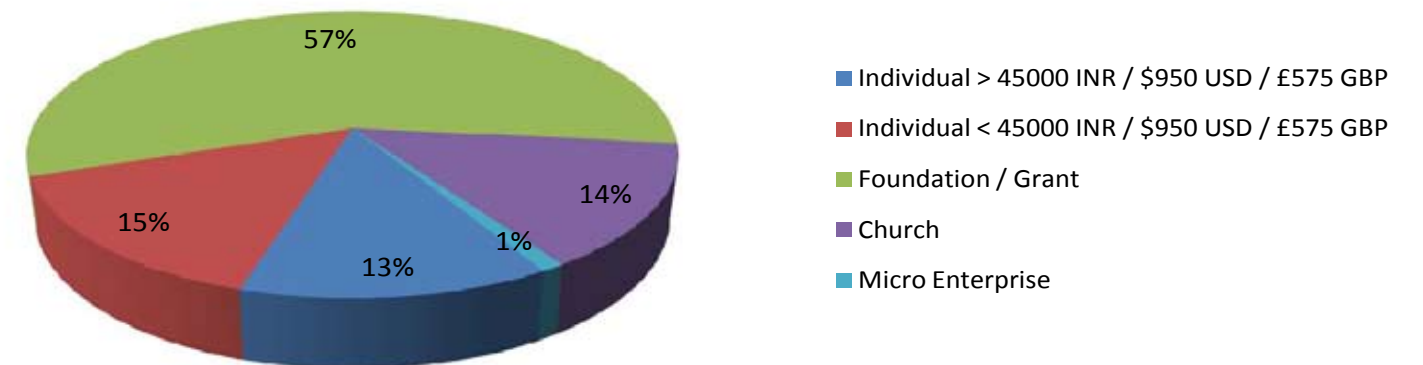
April 2008-March 2009

Total income: 1,17,37,834 INR / \$249,555 USD / £150,756 GBP



Donation Sources

April 2008-March 2009



Awards 2008/2009

Freedom Firm was one of four non-governmental organizations (NGOs) awarded the Espiritu award in 2008 by the Isabel Allende Foundation. Created in memory of Isabel's daughter, Paula Frias, an educator and psychologist in the poor communities of Venezuela and Spain, the Espiritu award seeks to aid international nonprofit organizations that fight against the exploitation of children.



Freedom Firm Boards

Freedom Firm Board

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