

Annual Report 2014-2015

FREEDOM FIRM
Rescue, Restoration, Justice



Highlights

Started operations in Uttar Pradesh, India.

Investigations in new areas in Maharashtra.

Riding Ring improvements.

First Avalanche camp for Ruhamah employees.

Number of girls rescued: 17

Number of aftercare follow ups: over 110 girls.



Letter from National Director

Many people ask me, “What are the greatest challenges you face in the work that you do?” Where should I begin? Is it corrupt officials? An apathetic government welfare department? The unbelievable inefficiencies of a broken criminal justice system? Inadequate funding? Staff turnover? Internal politics and conflict? Rescued girls who don't want to be rescued? Girls that walk the path to recovery for years only to suddenly disappear, or make a terrible decision? Acquittals? Tip offs? Girls re-trafficked? The list of challenges is really quite long.

Yet one challenge stands out among the rest, recruiting and retaining the right people. In the last 9 years many people have come and gone in Freedom Firm. There are a few people who have stood the test of time. Evan Henck, my long time colleague and friend, is one of them. Evan has served with Freedom Firm in India for over 7 years. At the end of September, 2015 he will return to the U.S. with his wife Leah and their two young girls.

In fact, Evan first volunteered with us in India in 2005, when we found and rescued 4 minor girls in Miraj, Maharashtra. Two years later during the summer, he volunteered again for Freedom Firm. Back in law school that fall, he said he would like to join Freedom Firm full time after he graduated. I hoped he would.

Typically, Evan does what he says. In 2008 Evan returned to India and joined a small team in Pune to start the Freedom Firm office there. For 2 years he dedicated himself to our legal work. He worked with public prosecutors and other advocates and learned how best to protect girls after their rescue and how to hold traffickers accountable. From 2008 to 2010 we initiated more than 30 interventions and rescued 89 young women and girls in Pune alone in that 3 year period. Evan had his hand in every single case. In the middle of 2010 Evan became Western Region Director and launched the work in Nagpur later that year.

For many people when they think of Freedom Firm, they think of Evan. He is the one who knows

the answers, he is the one who knows this work better than anybody. For many girls, he is the one who rescued them. Or he is the one who keeps them safe. For some brothel keepers, he is the one who put them in jail. For others he is the one who keeps them running from the law. Evan has made an impression on the world. One that many people will never forget. **If only there were more Evans on this earth, the challenge of finding the right people would hardly exist and sex-trafficking would be a thing of the past.**

I want to thank Evan for his years of dedicated service and finish with a few of his own words that he wrote in his June 5 letter to the staff: “... so we work for an organization that gets more blame than praise, yet undoubtedly is witness to history-altering change. We work for a mission that sees more value in visible impact than in chasing big numbers and in that way defies the call of the world. Freedom Firm's work comes with a cost, but God's grace pours forth. I cherish that I got to behold the beauty of such a work of God. I deeply love and respect Freedom Firm and each one of you and the friends who served before you. Your courage and commitment to fight for girls is an inspiration to me. Your stories from the field will be a gift to me for the rest of my life.”

*Warmly,
Greg Malstead
National Director, Freedom Firm*



Evan and Leah Henck

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 the girls file criminal complaints against their oppressors.

Restoration

Freedom Firm's social workers, working in partnership with shelter homes across the country, 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 help bring them to justice. Every trial and every conviction creates a deterrent and raises the cost of sex trafficking in India.

“

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Rescue

An Investigator's Experience



“ I wanted to know her story – who was she? How had she ended up in the dark confines of Nagpur’s brothels? If she had the chance to leave, would she take it? ”

The first time I went to the red-light area was when I was interviewing for a position in Freedom Firm. Greg asked me if I wanted to visit the red-light area in Nagpur and get a feel of the work. He told me what to expect and the precautions to be taken but the truth is, **nothing could prepare me for what I was about to experience.**

I was strolling down Ganga-Jamuna’s narrow lanes, trying to look casual, when she saw me. She must have been in her late twenties; quite old for this work considering that the area is filled with girls as young as 12-13 years old.

She beckoned me into her room, saying that she hadn’t had any customers that day and that she needed money for rent. Before I could decide what to do, she had grabbed me by my shirt, pulled me into the brothel and shut the door.

She pressed up against me as she tried taking off my shirt and shoes. Then she asked me to take off

my trousers. I was horrified. Never before had I encountered such brazen boldness. When I refused, she started checking my pockets for money. She seemed temporarily satisfied when she found my wallet, but this quickly turned to dismay when she found only Rs. 60 (\$1) in it. She demanded more money and grabbed my bike keys, holding me hostage until I capitulated.

Having no choice, I gave her more money only to suddenly find her all over me. Clearly she thought she now had to give me my money’s worth. I gently pushed her aside and managed to convince her that I wasn’t interested in having sex and just wanted to talk. I wanted to know her story – who was she? How had she ended up in the dark confines of Nagpur’s brothels? If she had the chance to leave, would she take it?

I learnt that her boyfriend had abandoned her while she was pregnant with his second child. Orphaned and a teenage mother of 2 children, she had turned for help to her grandmother who sold

her instead. She had been in prostitution for 10 years. Even if she could leave, where would she go?

Having desperately prayed the entire time for a way to extricate myself from this situation, relief washed over me when she eventually got bored of chatting and returned my keys.

This experience and many others that followed, impacted me deeply. **I realized that these were young girls who had been turned into commodities by circumstances and traffickers profiting from their helplessness.** Betrayed by family and brainwashed into believing that prostitution was their only future, exposure to a life of abuse and the fight for survival had hardened them and made them view prostitution as the accepted norm.

Only long-term counselling and aftercare support would help them come to terms with the abuse they had suffered and the life that had been stolen from them. Our job as investigators was to rescue them from despairing darkness, support them, and stand with them in the fight for justice.



*Surendra, Associate
Director of Investi-
gations*

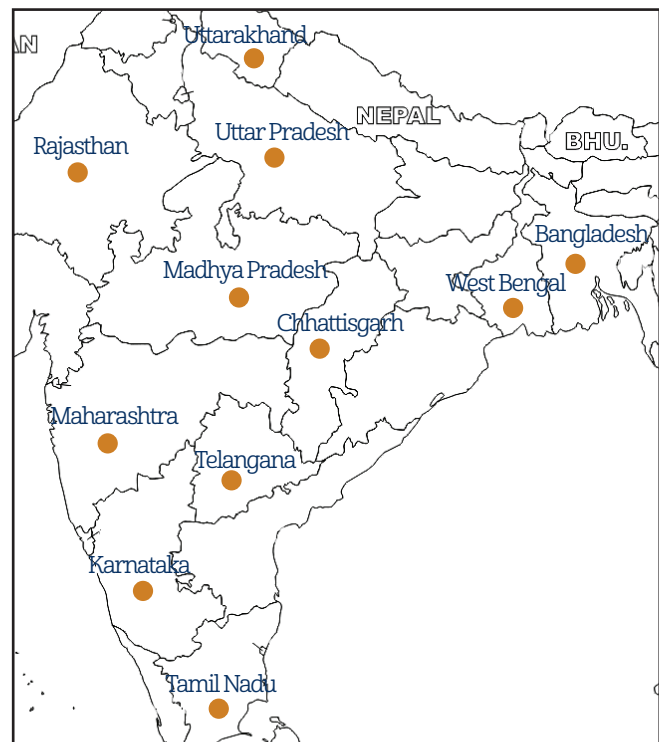
Rescue

Number of Girls Rescued
(April 2014- March 2015)



Restoration

Areas where Social Workers
followed up on rescued girls
(April 2014- March 2015)



Restoration

When a Village Isn't Enough



“ Trafficking of women begins when they are undervalued. What starts within the family, pervades into the community and becomes a strong culture. ”

Trafficking of women begins when they are undervalued. What starts within the family, pervades into the community and becomes a strong culture. At the heart of every trafficking incident is the twisted relationship between the daughter and her family. Ideally, daughters derive a sense of identity and love from their families. Sadly this was not the case for Reema*.

I met Reema in the shelter home after her rescue. She was emotionally broken. I knew there was more to her than what was seen on the surface. Her father, who left home three years earlier on the pretext of work, did not return. Her mother, who worked as a housemaid, struggled to provide for her family.

Hurt by her father's disappearance and surrounded by abject poverty, Reema ran away and met people who introduced her to prostitution. She was rescued when she was still a minor.

At the shelter home, Reema learned to make jewelry. She responded well and began to value herself. Though she was happy, she expressed her desire to go home to her mother. She affirmed her request

at court and her mother was given custody. Her mother and I were apprehensive about her decision to go home, but we hoped that Reema would seize the opportunity to create a new beginning. I stayed in touch with her to allay my fears. On one of our phone conversations she was disturbed. Her neighbors were verbally abusing her and were gossiping about her. The familiar fear came over her and she wanted to run away.

When I went to visit Reema, she was missing. Her mother was dejected. She had lost her daughter again. Together we filed a missing person complaint at the police station. Reema ran away from her problems instead of facing them, just as her father had done before. Her mother now dreams that her girl will come back and live the life she dreamt for her. “I will send her to the shelter home” she says,” to learn and get married.” We hope that someday, Reema will be found again.



◀ *Asha, Freedom Firm's social worker travels to homes of rescued girls to provide moral support*

**Name changed to protect identity*

Justice

Home at Last



“Of the first 100 girls Freedom Firm rescued in Nagpur, the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and District Court released 99 girls.”

In our work to end the sexual exploitation of minor girls, the resistance to their rescue and rehabilitation has been intense. Of the first 100 girls Freedom Firm rescued in Nagpur, the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) and District Court released 99 girls. In spite of this, girls are returning home...

Sajini* was 14 years old when she was rescued for the third time. We submitted endless letters to the CWC warning them of the risk of re-trafficking, but they released her anyway. We felt defeated. Nevertheless, on a follow up visit in early 2015, we found that she was at home, married and pregnant. She told our social workers that she was “so happy with this life.”

After we brought a complaint against the CWC for their part in releasing girls, cases of minor girls stopped being transferred to the CWC. Reshma*, who was rescued in 2014, was then released by the District Court based on a fake school document that alleged she was a major. On a follow up visit to her village, we found her at home, taking care of her family.

Freedom Firm rescued Sita* twice in 2013. The CWC used a new tactic to “transfer” Sita. We objected, the Court issued a stay on the transfer, but she was transferred anyway and released soon after. In late 2014, our social workers visited

her village. To their surprise and delight they found Sita safe with her family.

The CWC released Sonu* quickly because she was “troublesome” to the shelter home staff. It seemed to us that laws were meaningless, authority figures powerless, and rehabilitation and welfare of a child did not factor into anyone’s conscience. Yet, when we went to Sonu’s home, we found her living happily with her mother.

I was present the second time our team rescued Priya*. Priya seemed bored at the police station, as if she knew her rescue was just a part of her life. She was released within 2 months. I thought for sure she would be found again in Ganga Jamuna, Nagpur’s red-light area. When social workers met Priya’s sister, Rekha* (also formerly rescued) in their home, she said that Priya was safe.

The fact that Sajini, Reshma, Sita, Sonu, Priya and Rekha are not in red-light areas but rather at their homes is a sign of progress. **Freedom Firm knows the girls in Ganga Jamuna, and knows them personally.** With that kind of attention, it is difficult for brothel keepers to display them openly in public. That is the reason they are returning home.

Evan, Western Region Director

**Name changed to protect identity*

Expansion

Men of Honour, Men of Power



“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” *Edmund Burke, political thinker, 18th century England*

January 2015: We're a Novelty

In early January, the Freedom Firm team converged in Allahabad. When the Superintendent of Police, City discovered our purpose he immediately organized a police team and on the first night a minor girl, Kirti* was rescued and her brothel keeper arrested. All of us in Freedom Firm were elated by the cooperation we received from the police and the strong FIR that was filed against the brothel keeper.

It seemed like there would be great potential for really making an impact in Allahabad ... little did we know what the future would hold.

February: We're Getting Old. Fast

Anticipating the kind of cooperation we experienced in January we approached the police after finding a minor girl named Reshma* in the red-light area. Unfortunately the Red-Light area was alerted before the rescue could happen. Later in the day police said they were too busy to help. In the days that followed it was clear that the novelty of Freedom Firm had worn thin. Police officials, including the SP, City who had been helpful the previous month, stopped answering our calls and when they did they explained that they were too busy to conduct

a raid.

March: Police Downright Rude

When our staff went to meet police officials to secure cooperation for a raid, the Senior Superintendent of Police was actually rude to the team, threw our letter on the ground and refused to help. The Inspector General also refused to help and stated that rescuing minor girls was not a priority for the police in Allahabad.

Breakthrough with the most powerful police in the state

We had exhausted the hierarchy in Allahabad. I knew we needed to find someone in authority who could understand the importance of this issue and make a change in Allahabad. The Director General of Police (DGP) for the whole state of Uttar Pradesh is in Lucknow, 200 km from Allahabad. Surendra and I travelled to Lucknow on Monday, April 13th and met the DGP. He dictated a letter instructing the Allahabad police to take immediate action when given information of minor girls in prostitution. I was thrilled! This was more than we'd hoped for.

Tip Off #1

That same evening, our investigators confirmed that the girl found in February was still in the same brothel. The next day we met the Senior Superintendent of Police in Allahabad and handed him the letter from the DGP. He was clearly less motivated than the Director General but he instructed the local police accordingly. A raid was planned for that evening.

The minutes leading up to a raid are always the most delicate. If there's going to be a tip off, that's when it will happen. Surendra took a call from an investigator in the area, it was all being shut down, local police were present with lathi sticks, the brothel keepers locked all the doors ... someone leaked the information. Less than 5 minutes later the police said they were ready for the raid. We told them the area was shut down and asked them to wait for a while to see if it returned to normal. We knew the chances of that were slim.

The Butt of Jokes

More than an hour later there was no change in the red-light area. We returned to the police station and found a large group of officers in a meeting. They began to joke and laugh. They asked us why we didn't go to Kolkata or Mumbai to find minor girls? Why didn't we understand that the police have lots of work to do? They don't have time to help. The fact that a minor girl was in prostitution literally 100 metres from the police station for the past 2 months didn't seem to dampen their humour.

Still Stalling

On Wednesday we tried to meet the Senior Superintendent of Police but he was unavailable. The following day we tried again to meet the SSP but relentless phone calls and waiting outside offices resulted in no response.

Tip Off #2

On Friday, Surendra and Abraham finally met the SSP, the SP, City, and the IG and were promised full cooperation. Chances of success were good, we felt a breakthrough was imminent, but the same set of local police were again called on to conduct the raid. Predictably, there was a tip off and waiting throughout the evening did not result in the red-light area returning to normal. The police agreed to try again the next day but it was Monday before they were ready to take action.

Tip Off #3

On Monday, just before the raid was planned our investigators found that the red-light area had been tipped off again.

Red Light; Area Re-opens

Our team and the police kept waiting in the area and finally the brothel doors started to open in one of the lanes. One of our investigators saw our target girl peering out of a doorway, immediately engaged her and gave the signal to launch the raid. After rescuing our target girl along with two other victims, a strong FIR (First Information Report) was filed at the police station against the brothel keeper that included sections of the Indian Penal Code, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act.

Two months after finding minor girls in prostitution and one week after meeting the Director General of Police, the rescue finally took place.

When men of honour persist, and men of power choose to act, the practice of putting girls in prostitution and the willingness to allow it to happen will change.

Greg, National Director Freedom Firm



Ruhamah Designs

Her Dream: Marriage and Children



Namrata and Ramisa



Karishma and Sarah

“ I dream of them continuing their education, becoming independent women and overcoming the trauma of their past. ”

I am beginning to realize that our dreams for the girls are so different than what they dream for themselves. I dream of them continuing their education, becoming independent women and overcoming the trauma of their past. The girls dream of gaining stability and status through marriage and having children. We know this dream makes them vulnerable but we need to be part of this process. So we support and guide the girls towards the multiple steps of finding life partners, in-laws and the joint family, and towards the wider net of the village community. We can only hope they will have safe futures as their dreams become reality.

Many of young girls rescued years ago are now grown up and having families of their own and making responsible choices for their children.

Namrata, who is from our very first batch at the Calcutta workshop

Namrata*, against the advice of Ruhamah social workers, married an older man. Shortly after getting pregnant, Namrata learned he was already married and had children of his own. Namrata had been tricked and was now a second wife. All our fears were realized. Learning that her husband was irresponsible and unwilling to financially support her, Namrata moved in with her parents. Namrata gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Ramisa, in March this year. Her husband visits her often at her parents' house and keeps demanding money

for a motorcycle. Ruhamah social workers counsel her to be responsible as a mother and save her money in a bank account.

Namrata is the first girl who accepted the benefits offered by Ruhamah Designs. First, she took her three month maternity leave. Secondly, she chose to participate in the matching savings scheme developed by Ruhamah Designs. Today, Namrata is working at the Ruhamah Designs Kolkata workshop while her parents look after her baby at home.

Karishma, Freedom Firm's first rescued girl

Karishma*, rescued by Freedom Firm nine years ago when she was twelve, is now married and has a little baby girl, Sarah. Ruhamah staff knew it would be a tough road for Karishma, since she was only twenty one years old and emotionally unstable. In addition, her husband was not earning much money. Early interactions with her husband and his family while learning to live in a joint family home were very difficult for Karishma. Nevertheless, she has settled down as a wife and mother. She had transformed into an independent and responsible young woman. She loves little Sarah very much. Her maternity leave is over now, and she is working for the Ruhamah Designs “Work At Home” program. She is able to balance earning money with providing care for her baby.

Catherine Raja, CEO, Ruhamah Designs

**Names changed to protect identity*

Leg Up

A Year of Improvement



For years I've been longing for good infrastructure for Leg Up. Freedom Firm partners gave generous grants and we were able to tackle two projects this year.

Leveling the Riding Ring

Six years ago when Greg spent nine days with a back hoe to cut out a riding ring from a 45 degree hill, our riding ring was not level. It was three feet higher on one end of the riding ring. The ring was rocky, rough and fairly inhospitable. The project this year took over 3 months to complete. Two to five workers relentlessly pickaxed the hard stone surface and moved stone to create a completely level surface.

Creating a Round Pen

Another long time dream was to build a round pen. Round pens are wonderful tools both for training horses and for facilitating "join-up." Join-Up is the training of horses using their language to establish trust. In a short three day project, we measured, cut logs from the property and built a 45 foot round pen. **All summer long the rescued girls and the three horses have been enjoying building trust through join-up.** The girls have grown in confidence and security with the horses. They have learned to be "the boss" and know how to gently but firmly lead each horse.

Mala, Director of Special Projects



◀ *A rescued girl completely at ease, bareback riding on Firefly.*

Avalanche

We need Faith



At the tenth Avalanche camp, participants arrived in Ooty from Kolkata, Mumbai and places as far flung as Assam. At a late lunch after they arrived, two girls from Assam separated themselves from the group of girls and hugged us. One was Reba and the other was tiny, 15 year old, Manju*.

We came back to the office and learned that Manju had run away. She had jumped on a bike and headed into Ooty town. Our worst fears were realized. A minor had run away during our camp.

Our team scattered in several directions in search of Manju. We searched the bus station in case she had boarded one of the many buses bound for larger cities. We headed to the police station at 7 pm to officially file a missing person report. Just then the police called Jenitha, our head finance person. "We have the girl," they said. "You had better come." What transpired next was told to me by Freedom Firm staff who went to the police station and learnt what had happened.

The biker had dropped her off on the road, and she had fallen down, lost consciousness and had a seizure. Eight men quickly gathered and took her to the police station.

At the police station the appropriate documents

were drawn up and she was released back to our custody. When we finally had the chance to hear from her she said she had run away many times before. She talked about her past to our staff. She ran from her parents and ended up in a brothel. She also had a history of "fits", and between running away and epilepsy, her family refused to take her back after rescue.

I sent the team off to the wilderness camp in fear and trembling. Unable to attend the camp due to torn ligaments in my ankle, I had to wait for nightly reports from staff calling in.

Day one: Manju is peaceful. We have taken lice out of her hair.

Day two: We made sure she took a bath.

Day three: She asked why we take care of her and we told her we love her.

Day four: All things quiet.

The camp was over and the group headed back to Ooty for the final closing ceremony. When I asked for volunteers to share what they had learned at camp, Manju was eager to share. At camp, she had made many steps along the path to freedom. **She needed mothering. She needed love. She found both of those at the camp.**

Mala, Director of Special Projects

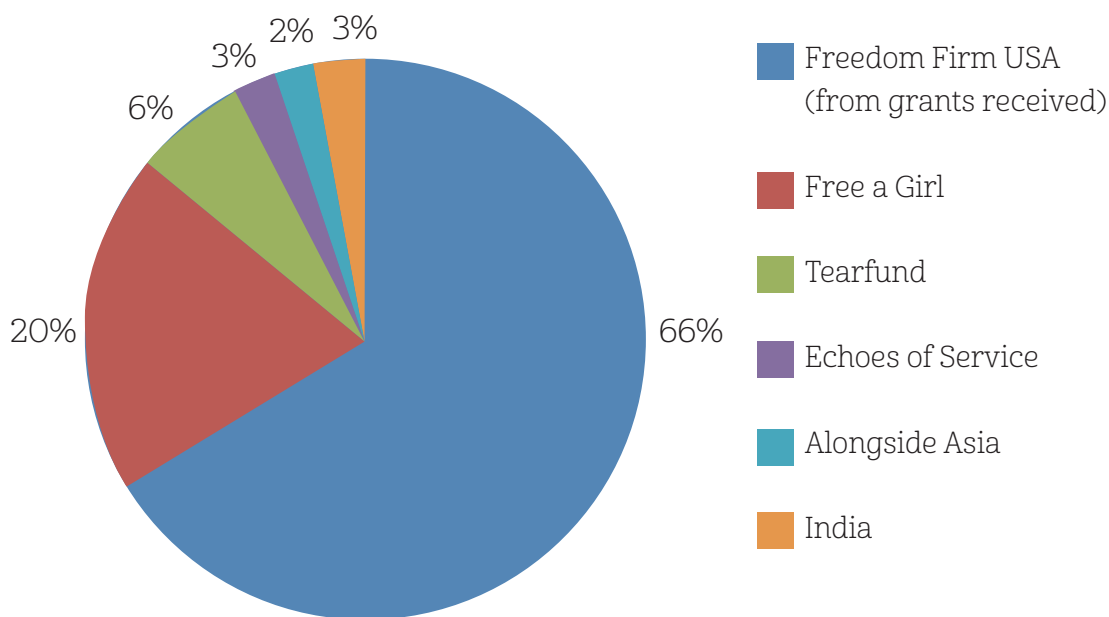
*Name changed to protect identity

Funding

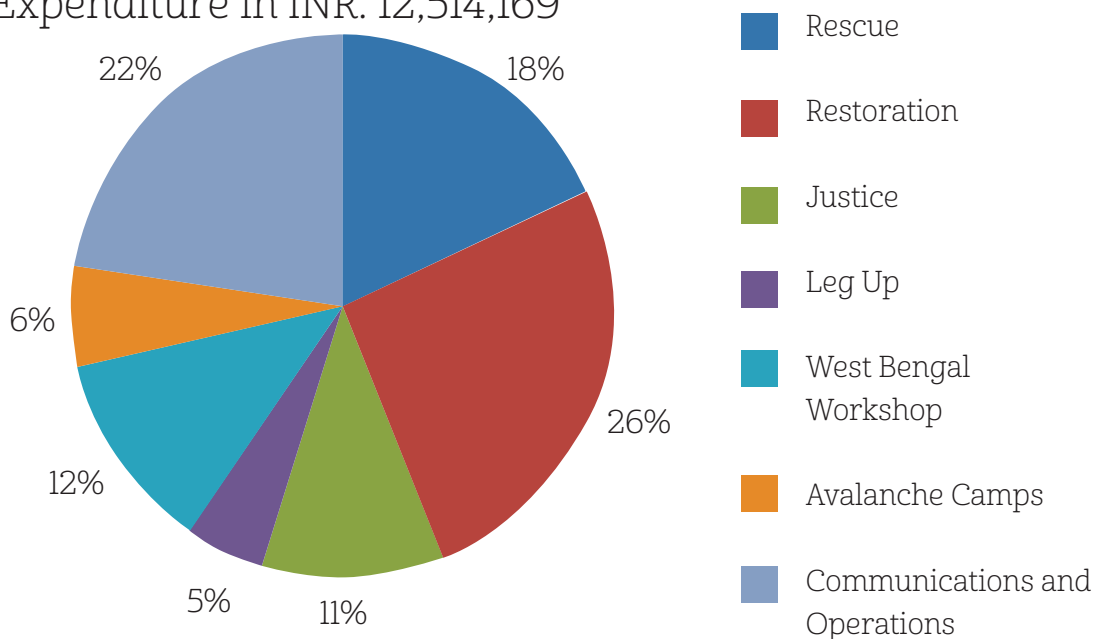
Freedom Firm's total income for the year was Rs. 14,375,998 or \$239,600 (11% more than last year's income of 12,923,143). Our sources of income have been grants given through Freedom Firm USA, direct grants from donors in Europe and USA, and individual donations in India.

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: 14,375,998



Expenditure in INR: 12,514,169



Grants from foundations and churches that funded our operations in 2014 – 15

Some of the grants were donated in the previous financial year but have funded some of our program costs this year.

Grants received through Freedom Firm USA

- Artists in Residence
- Blackhawk Church
- Browncroft Church
- First Fruits
- Freedom 4/24
- Matterial Fix
- Murthy Nayak Foundation
- Operation Blessing International
- Sevenly
- The Hugh and Charlotte Maclellan Charitable Trust
- The Isabel Allende Foundation
- Tru Needs
- Woodsedge Church
- Trinity Presbyterian Church

Other grants

- Alongside Asia (USA)
- Echoes of Service (UK)
- Free a Girl (Netherlands)
- Tearfund (UK)
- World Charitable Fund of Ireland (Ireland)

To continue giving, please visit our website: www.freedom.firm.in for online donations.

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

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P.O. Box 33056
Denver CO 80233
(Freedom Firm USA is a US registered non-profit 501 (c) (3) Tax ID: 20-5280075. All donations are tax-deductible for US taxpayers.)

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Freedom Firm
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