



# Annual Report 2018 - 2019

  
**FREEDOM FIRM**  
RESCUE | RESTORATION | JUSTICE



SIXTY SEVEN GIRLS  
PARTICIPATED  
IN FREEDOM CAMPS



 28  
NEW AREAS  
INVESTIGATED



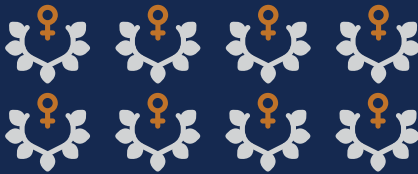
CASES FILED  
AGAINST  
THIRTY TWO  
TRAFFICKERS

 50

WOMEN AND GIRLS  
RESCUED FROM  
BROTHELS

 23

BAIL APPLICATIONS  
OPPOSED



8 GIRLS TRAINED  
IN JEWELRY  
MAKING

 2  
CONVICTIONS

3   

RESCUE OPERATIONS  
IN NEW AREAS

 55  
BROTHELS  
CLOSED  
DOWN

FREEDOM FIRM HIGHLIGHTS 2018 - 2019



RESCUE | RESTORATION | JUSTICE



# A Year of Keeping Heart

“Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers,  
but to be fearless in facing them.  
Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain, but  
for the heart to conquer it.”  
- Rabindranath Tagore



Persistence and standing firm are words that come to mind when I think about this last year. My personal definition of persistence: energetic steadfastness under pressure, and endurance when faced with trials.

At Freedom Firm, persistence is a core value that we constantly develop as we deal with the many challenges and trials that are a regular part of our journey.

Every employee who joins Freedom Firm has a genuine desire to serve and make a difference. Leading them effectively means guiding this enthusiasm so it will produce a tenacity that keeps them going when circumstances seem impossible. The obstacles are often overwhelming: the government at times refuse Freedom Firm social workers access to remand homes even though our staff were the ones responsible for rescuing the girls, rescued girls sometimes turn hostile towards Freedom Firm in court and government home supervisors at whim release girls (girls who were painstaking rescued after weeks and sometimes months of careful strategizing) back into the hands of the traffickers. These are just a few of the crushing blows Freedom Firm staff experience every day.

Yet these discouragements are nothing compared to what each rescued girl endures. I continue to marvel that these young girls can survive the traumas they live through in the brothels! They inspire us to keep going, as we battle against the odds to carve out a safe place in hostile soil for them to flourish.

As the social workers spend weeks counselling and teaching them life skills, a steely determination to live a new life, starts to

emerge. After initial days of apparent indifference to reliable advice, they begin to realize their days of slavery are over and they were made for something else.

I think of Reha as I write my message. Strong, determined and wonderful Reha. Even though she contracted a fatal illness when she was sold into sex-slavery she was full of energy and will to live and didn't want to miss a single special moment with her children. It is that kind of passion and zeal that serves as an inspiration and reminder to the rest of us. She had such an unshakable confidence in us, no matter what she did, or how many mistakes she made, the staff in Freedom Firm could be trusted, and would always be her safe haven.

This year the victories have been plenty; the investigations that led to the rescue of girls, the First Information Reports (FIR's) that were filed, rescued girls that were reunited with their families and communities, testimonies that were spoken in court against perpetrators, brothels that were shut down, and breakthroughs in emotional healing at the Freedom Wilderness camps that were experienced by the rescued girls. Perseverance of the staff has yielded an amazing harvest: two convictions, 100 empowered survivors and 50 rescued survivors from 10 red-light areas in India.

We are encouraged by all that was accomplished and lean into the challenges, knowing we persevere for the sake of each and every girl. Looking back, it is my pleasure and that of all the staff at Freedom Firm to thank everyone for their generous support and commit once again, *“to not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9*

Catherine Raja,  
National Director, **Freedom Firm**

# The Mission

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 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's 10<sup>th</sup> Conviction!

On 31st January 2019, the Additional Sessions judge in Pune sentenced Laxmi Bhimsingh Tamang, a brothel keeper arrested for trafficking and prostitution to 3 years of rigorous imprisonment. Sapna and another minor girl were one of Laxmi's many victims of trafficking.

Here is Sapna's story. Sapna was trafficked from Bangladesh to India when she was in her early teens. In March 2016, Freedom Firm rescued Sapna from a brothel in Budhwarpet, Pune and placed her in a government remand home. A week into Sapna's stay, 40 girls ran away from the home. Sapna was one of the few girls who decided to remain. She took part in the activities organized by the staff at the remand home and was counseled regularly by a Freedom Firm social worker. As the months passed, Sapna started to trust the Freedom Firm staff and agreed to testify against Laxmi, her brothel keeper.

Laxmi appealed for bail twice at the Pune Sessions Court during her time in prison. Both her appeals were denied. She served time for eight months (March 2016-November 2016) after which the Bombay High Court granted her bail on medical grounds.

In April 2017, one year after Sapna's rescue, she was summoned to testify in court. Her testimony was so strong that the public prosecutor was sure it would result in a conviction. Freedom Firm staff who were witnesses to Sapna's rescue from the brothel were called to testify a month later but the defence lawyer delayed proceedings for over a year. Sapna was repatriated to Bangladesh in May 2017.

In September 2018, Freedom Firm staff were called to testify in court. Once again, the brothel keeper and her lawyer tried to delay proceedings and avoid jail time, but they were unsuccessful. Typically, eight witnesses are summoned to give their testimony, but because Sapna's own story was so strong, only five witnesses testified in total. After serving only eight months in prison in 2016, in January 2019 Laxmi Bhimsingh Tamang was convicted under 2 sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and 4 sections of the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act (ITPA) for 3 years of rigorous imprisonment with hard labor.

Laxmi's conviction has served as a warning to the trafficking community that buying and selling minors will not be tolerated and will have serious consequences.



01



## Background

Sapna trafficked from Bangladesh and sold to a brothel in India

02



## March 2016

Sapna rescued from brothel in Pune by Freedom Firm and the police

03



## March 2016-November 2016

Brothel keeper Laxmi's 2 bail attempts are rejected. She serves time in prison for 8 months and is released on medical grounds

04



## March 2016- April 2017

Sapna participated in activities in the remand home and was counseled by Freedom Firm social workers.

05



## April 2017

Sapna summoned to court and testifies boldly.

06



## May 2017

Defence lawyer delays proceedings for over a year.

07



## September 2018

Freedom Firm staff summoned to court to testify.

08



## 31st January 2019

Brothel keeper Laxmi Bhimsingh Tamang is convicted and sentenced to 3 years rigorous imprisonment with hard labour



## The Hunt for Meera's little girl

21-year-old Meera was rescued by anti-trafficking organization in 2016 and placed in a private shelter home. Two years later Meera revealed to the shelter home staff that she had lost her three-year-old daughter at the time of her rescue. Unable to take action themselves, they turned to Freedom Firm, for help in tracking Meera's daughter.

### Discarded and left Destitute

At Freedom Firm's adventure camp in Kodaikanal in June 2018, Meera recounted her tragic life story to Freedom Firm social worker, Serena. Meera lived in Pune with her husband and two children. Her husband had an affair and abandoned the family for another woman. After he left, Meera and her children were destitute. A "friend" allowed them to stay with her and encouraged Meera to turn to prostitution to pay for her keep. Since Meera did not have any prior work experience or marketable skills, she had little choice but to sell her body.

Meera placed her son Rahul in a government home and left her daughter Suraya with her friend while she worked in a brothel every day. Suddenly rescued during a brothel raid, whisked off to the police station and immediately sent to a remand home, Meera was unable to collect Suraya from her friend's house. No one knows why it took Meera two years to reveal that she had a missing daughter.

Fearful that a brothel keeper was exploiting the little girl, Freedom Firm investigators went undercover to look for Suraya in October 2018. There was no sign of her in the brothels they visited. Fortunately, the shelter home staff gave Meera's friend's address to our investigators. On visiting the friend, our investigators learned that Suraya had run away, was found, and was then placed in a government remand home.

### Wonder of Wonders

When Freedom Firm social worker Serena went to the shelter home to inquire about Meera's daughter, she realized that it was the same home where Meera said she had left her son Rahul several years earlier. Shelter home volunteers brought Suraya and Rahul to meet Serena. The two children looked similar. When Serena introduced them to each other they stood still, silent and shocked. After three years of separation, the siblings were reunited.

Freedom Firm shared its findings with the Child Welfare Committee who ruled that Meera was unable to look after her children on two accounts. First, she did not report that she had a daughter at the time of rescue and secondly because her income was insufficient to take care of them.

Although Meera is sad to be separated from her children, she knows that they are safe in an orphanage and have a chance at being adopted by a family who can offer them the love and support they need.



# Namesake



## Rahab:

when walls tumbled  
she saved her family, Rahab.  
She's the beautiful bearer  
of divine image,  
ancestor of Jesus,  
proud lineage,  
Rahab.  
Could there be a better name?

Long after rescue  
the man you married  
did not work. He  
stole your earnings  
time and time again.  
You birthed children  
in dark alleyways  
while  
weakness grew like  
cancer,  
and light waned  
slowly for years  
from your shining eyes.  
You looked into  
the globe,  
clairvoyant, and  
saw your future.

You thought only  
of your two  
little ones;  
beautiful girl,  
sweet baby boy.

*You threw down ropes  
of rescue  
and baskets of hiding.  
You have hidden them well  
(as Miriam hid baby Moses).  
in the arms  
of a new mother.*

## IV Death

You shriveled before our eyes,  
ghost like, wraith-like.  
You dimmed, grew  
transparent,  
skin stretched tight over bone,  
skeleton visible  
before you entered the grave.

## I Queen Rani

Your brothel name was Rani,  
“queen” in Hindi,  
a fancy fabrication  
to dress up a slave.  
She wasn't you,  
just a pretext for a  
prescribed part,  
a little girl promenaded  
for a grown-up world.

*She was smart.  
How about Reha instead?  
I want Rahab.  
Reha is better;  
two names  
almost the same.*

Head bowed, you look away.  
You give in, to my shame.  
You became Reha.

## II Reha

In life after rescue  
you wanted  
a new name.  
An ancient story  
conjured  
an image you held fast,  
her name fixed  
in your shining eyes.

*I want the name Rahab.  
But she was a prostitute!  
She was brave.  
People will think the worst!  
She threw down ropes  
of rescue,  
hid spies in baskets,  
risked all  
to save her family.*

You can't be Rahab,  
*She was good,*  
Please not Rahab.

## III Rahab

Today I honor you  
as Rahab,  
like *you* wanted,  
not I.





Rahab in Hebrew means  
"large."

Though tiny and insubstantial  
you towered above tradition.  
You chose burial instead of  
burning,  
your expansive display  
of defiance in death  
reverberates.  
I hear you still.

You never fit the mold,  
like your name, Rahab:  
Not ashamed, Rahab,  
little body, large heart,  
Oh Rahab.

### **V Mary**

Another prostitute is chosen,  
Lips kiss feet, caresses  
with long, unbound black hair.  
Perfume anoints.  
She is a chalice that foretells  
His death.

### **VI Woman at the Well**

To yet another woman,  
He gives the holy grail,  
living water,  
sweet water  
from the well  
at the end of the world,  
never to thirst again.

### **VII New Name**

You are hidden from us now.  
He gives you Heaven's manna.  
Feathers cover you,  
Arms shelter.  
On a white stone  
He writes a new name  
which only you know.

*What is your name now?*

*--Mala Malstead*



# Freedom Camps

Continuing our efforts to enable more girls and shelter homes to participate in regional Freedom Camps in India, in 2018 Freedom Firm hosted three camps in Kodaikanal, Coonoor and Kolegal with a total of 67 girls engaging in activities such as swing walking, archery, rope course, swimming, rappelling, slack line and jummaring.



April - Coonoor - 23

"I have only seen mountains in pictures and movies. I never thought I could actually go this close and see everything from there. Freedom Camp gave me that chance."

- Monira, a survivor of sex trafficking

"When we were playing in water, we fell down many times but no one laughed at me. I felt so free and comfortable and wanted to play again."

- Pakki, a survivor of sex trafficking

"When I saw other girls jummaring, I was so excited but I thought that is something I can never do since I am old. But climbing up made me so free and happy."

- Kalpana, a woman who left the sex trade

"This camp gave me an opportunity to discover the hidden talents and also the pain and hurt our girls carry inside. Thank you for making me a part of such a community."

- Savithri, a volunteering Staff





November- Kolegal - 23

"I was able to see many of the shy girls come forward and do things. It was really good for me to see the girls experience freedom."

- Natasha, a volunteer from the host team

"The volunteers were very patient with us. Even when I asked them to print my picture 4th time, they did it without yelling at me. It is the first time someone behaved with me like that."

- Subhashini, a survivor of sex trafficking



June - Kodaikanal - 21

"During the small group session I realized that I am more than what happened to me or what I did."

- Girija, a survivor of sex trafficking





# Multiplying Efforts in West Bengal

Since the beginning of Freedom Firm in 2006, social workers focused on restoration in West Bengal, tracking, monitoring, counselling and supporting rescued girls who returned to their homes or who were placed in various shelter homes. Then, in 2013 Freedom Firm began work in Kolkata, supporting and managing the Freedom Firm business, Ruhamah Designs. Now, Freedom Firm has launched its very first investigative and rescue operation in West Bengal, in response to deeply concerning trafficking trends in the state.

## Troubling Trafficking Trends

In 2018 Freedom Firm's extensive investigations across West Bengal revealed that there were fewer official reports of sexual exploitation of minors. They discovered however, that the real situation was very different. There were actually more minor girls being sold into prostitution than before. This trend was noticed in Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas. The West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child of Human Trafficking of Minors Rights reported that there has also been a rise in trafficking of minors in residential areas.

## A well oiled nefarious network

Planning and executing rescue operations have proved to be more complex and expensive in

West Bengal when compared to other parts of the country. The sex trafficking network is well established and has been able to function effectively under the radar for many years. The traffickers are able to procure fake documents easily for minor girls stating that they are majors. When the police conduct a raid, they refuse to arrest the girls because the girls produce their fake documents. Freedom Firm established a permanent presence in Kolkata in January of 2019 to tackle these problems.

## Fake Documentation Hinders Rescue

In January 2019, Freedom Firm, together with another local NGO Justice Ventures International (JVI), launched a cooperative effort to rescue minors in Sonagachi, the largest red-light area in Kolkata. On the 7th February, the two intervention teams raided two brothels in Sonagachi and found eleven girls engaged in prostitution. The police refused to rescue ten of the girls since they carried identity cards stating that they were over eighteen years old. Only one girl, Ruchi, did not have any form of documentation. While the intervention teams were trying to sort out this matter, a pro-prostitution group arrived at the brothel and convinced the police that the girls were not forced into prostitution and had legitimate documents.

Ruchi from Agra, Uttar Pradesh, was the only minor girl rescued in the raid. She was placed in a remand home in Kolkata. We hope to obtain a court order giving us permission to counsel Ruchi.







## MAHARASHTRA

### New Areas Investigated

Uruli Devachi, Yaval, Chakan  
MIDC, Shikrapur, Kirkatwadi,  
Paithan, Osmanabad,  
Talegaon, Loni, Vijapur.

### Raids in New Areas

Washim

## UTTAR PRADESH

### New Areas Investigated

Basai AGRA, Hamirpur,  
Balrampur, Shravasti,  
Bahraich, Mahoba, Faizabad,  
Mainpuri, Siddharth Nagar,  
Amethi, Lakhaniya,  
Nathaniya, Sultanpur,

Chandoli, Sonbhadra,  
Ambedkar Nagar, Gazipur,  
Varanasi

### Raids in New Areas

Varanasi

## Brothels Closed

Meerut

## MADHYA PRADESH

### New Areas Investigated

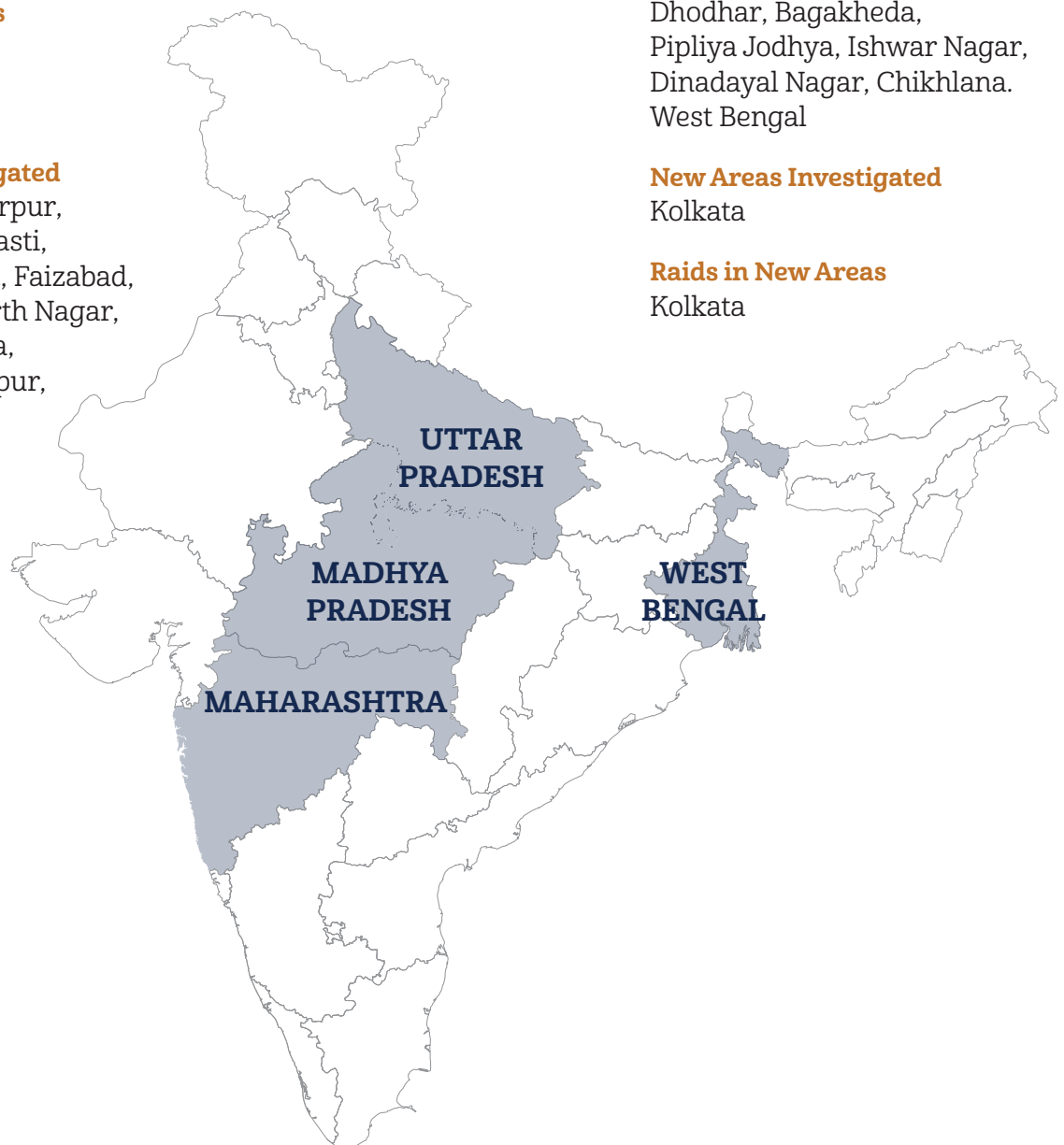
Kalaliya, Moyakheda,  
Khachrana, Parvaliya,  
Dhodhar, Bagakheda,  
Pipliya Jodhya, Ishwar Nagar,  
Dinadayal Nagar, Chikhlana.  
West Bengal

### New Areas Investigated

Kolkata

### Raids in New Areas

Kolkata



# Ruhamah Growing and Glowing

Ruhamah Designs has been focusing on expanding its work in Kolkata as the city houses the only Ruhamah Designs workshop and acts as the business headquarters for continued workshop expansion. Ruhamah has been eager to respond to the particular needs of women from Kalighat, a large red-light area in the city. Ruhamah first approached the women in Kalighat by inviting them to attend a one day workshop in May 2019 where they were taught how to make basic jewelry items. Many of the women showed a keen interest in crafting jewelry as an alternate livelihood to sex work.

However, factors like salary, physically leaving the area to go to work and a structured work environment were serious concerns that they had. Most of these women were trafficked when they were barely 12 years old and have limited knowledge of the outside world. It takes a strong community to help the women leave sex-work behind and recover from their trauma. Over the course of a year, Ruhamah has built the kind of trusting relationships needed for the women to make their first steps towards freedom from the trade. Following the initial workshop, Ruhamah now has 4 women from Kalighat working with them full time.

## New Skills for Ruhamah Employees

Ruhamah Designs is all about upward mobility. Women begin at an entry-level, and once they have proven their capacity to take on greater responsibility, they are promoted. Currently, there are 9 women employed full time at Ruhamah, 4 are jewelry artisans, 3 are Aari artisans, 1 is an Aari trainer and 1 is a pyrography trainer. One of the artisans with a sharp eye for detail oversees the quality control of all products and assists in sourcing the materials. Another has taken on cleaning and cooking responsibilities and helps to ensure the workshop runs smoothly. The women from Kalighat who joined the Ruhamah Designs team have settled down well and are well on their way to becoming skilled artisans.

Our new collection titled Waves of Fall was launched in October 2018. Immediately after the collection launch, a design workshop was conducted in November where the women were taught pyrography and card making. The artisans enjoyed the training and have acquired new skills which they will use to launch a whole new set of products in 2019. Developing new products provides a foundation for more opportunities to employ women across the whole of India.



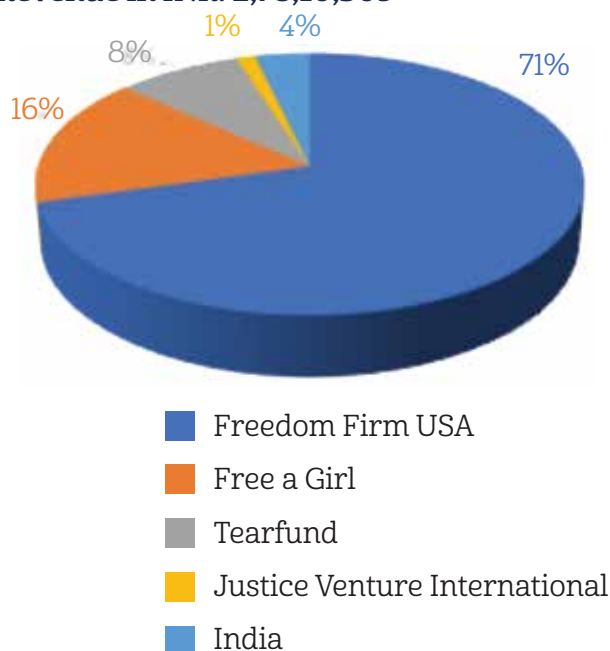
\*Name changed to protect identity



# Funding

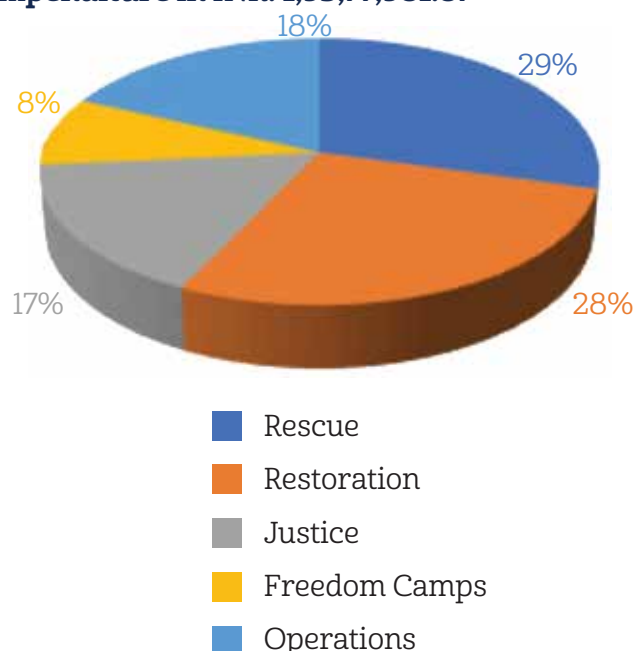
Freedom Firm's total revenue for FY18 was Rs.2,78,10,509 or \$ 427,854 (43% more than last year's revenue of \$228,452) Our sources of revenue have been through grants received from Freedom Firm USA, direct grants from donors in Europe and the USA, and individual donors in India.

## Revenue in INR: 2,78,10,509



We could not have achieved all that we set out to do without the generous support of individuals, foundations and churches from across the world. We are deeply appreciative of all who contributed to Freedom Firm and allowed us to expand our rescue, restoration and justice efforts for victims of sex trafficking in India.

## Expenditure in INR: 1,95,77,981.87



## Grants from Foundations and Churches that funded our operations in 2018-19

### Grants received through Freedom Firm USA

Anonymous  
She is Priceless  
One Days Wages  
Operation Blessings  
Engage Foundation  
Woodsedge  
Individual donors

### Grants received directly by Freedom Firm

Alongside Asia  
Free a Girl  
Tearfund  
JVI

### Local Donations - India

Individuals

Donations by check can be mailed to:

### In the US

Freedom Firm USA  
811 N. Kansas Ave.  
E. Wenatchee, WA.98802

To contribute online please visit  
[www.freedomfirm.org](http://www.freedomfirm.org)

(Freedom Firm USA is a US registered non-profit 501©(3) Tax ID:20-5280075.

All donations are tax-deductible for US taxpayers)

### In India

Freedom Firm,  
Door Number 8/10  
USSS Animation Centre,  
Charing Cross  
Ooty, The Nilgris -643001

To contribute online please visit  
[www.freedomfirm.org](http://www.freedomfirm.org)

(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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*This annual report reflects the activities and financial details of Freedom Firm, a charitable trust registered in Udhagamandalam, Tamil Nadu. The list of Trustees / Directors includes the Board of Directors for Freedom Firm USA a non profit organization incorporated in the state of Minnesota, USA. Freedom Firm and Freedom Firm USA are independent, legally distinct entities with a separate Board of Trustees / Directors as listed in this annual report.*

*Front cover photo: Asha, Associate Director of Nagpur region meeting a survivor of sex trafficking in her village.*

*Back cover page: Freedom Firm staff enjoying a beautiful sunset on a retreat day.*