



World's Children

Prevention of Child Trafficking Program



April 2017—February 2022

Overview

You've heard the saying "It takes a village to raise a child." The Franciscan Sisters are proving that

~ It takes a village to prevent child trafficking ~

In 2017, World's Children began funding a three-year Prevention of Child Trafficking (PCT) program conceived and operated by Catholic sisters in India. The program was designed to educate and train adults and children how to identify and thwart traffickers.

The total population of the target area for the program was 151,000 people in a particularly vulnerable area for trafficking in the state of Telangana. Over a three-year period, the PCT team of five staff members educated over 120,000 adults and children living in 211 villages, and 12,297 girls and boys in 80 schools.

Because of the tremendous success of this prevention program, WC is extending support for this program for an additional three years. This will allow the PCT team to expand into new areas.

As of 2021, 182 villages in India are 100% safe for girls and women because of the community protections now firmly in place.

The team will continue their current program and enlarge the area to include villages in two more districts in Telangana, India that are hard-hit by traffickers.

The continuing program will serve 393,629 people in three districts that include both urban and rural communities. With a blanket of watchful eyes, we believe child trafficking can be stopped in this targeted area.



The women are meeting with a local council elder to discuss how to end trafficking in their village.



Village women attend classes about trafficking.

"India is the most dangerous country for women in terms of human trafficking, including sex slavery and domestic servitude, and for customary practices such as forced marriage and female infanticide." —Thomson Reuters Foundation

Objectives

The Prevention of Child Trafficking team has established these program objectives:

- Make villages safe for girls.
- Educate communities and school children on human trafficking.
- Make every community responsible for preventing trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and adolescent girls.
- Empower child clubs and community vigilant committees to watch for trafficking and missing children.
- Help rescue, rehabilitate and reintegrate trafficked women and girls.
- Train girls in self-defense using swaraksha (self-protection) knowledge.
- Promote involvement of media, police, health personnel, government officers and policy makers in preventing child trafficking.



A village meeting for fathers

Challenges

- Sometimes the safety of the staff is at risk from well-known members of a village.
- Some people are reluctant to have these programs in their villages.
- In some villages there is 100% illiteracy and so it takes more effort to help them understand.
- There are cases where even the police are helpless because the parents are uncooperative when they feel the reputation of the family may be damaged.
- Some girls have been sold by their own relatives.
- Some staff members have been threatened by children's relatives and traffickers.
- Sometimes drunken men try to disturb the programs.
- Sometimes the power goes out during night programs.

Strategy

As they educate rural villagers about how traffickers operate, the PCT team tries to reach the entire village population with different techniques. The team holds meetings with the village sarpanch (elected head of the village) and the panchayat (the council that works with the sarpanch). The PCT team explains how traffickers operate and then ask these village elders to take an oath to be the guardians of the girls in their village.

We thank the PCT teams for their bravery and dedication to end child trafficking in India. Please donate whatever you can to keep this vital program going.

Community Vigilant Committees



Once there is buy-in from the village government, these village elders also are encouraged to create **Community Vigilant Committees** comprised of village politicians, self help group representatives, the government nurse for their village, local teachers and the government revenue officer. These community committees can be relied upon to take action when anyone in the village reports an incident or a strange person acting suspiciously.

The women

Women's self help groups already exist in many villages. Generally these groups are set up to help women start savings accounts, gain loans, learn new skills and support each other in a male-dominated society. Now a new purpose is being introduced by the PCT team.

The village women learn about traffickers and are encouraged to track newcomers to their villages and immediately contact authorities when a girl is suddenly missing. They are taught the importance of education for girls and the danger of sending girls to distant places for work or marriage.



A self help group of women wait for a program to start that will teach them what they can do to stop trafficking.

The men



These determined young men (right) and women (left) meet to find out how they can protect children from traffickers.

The children

School assemblies are arranged and the team discusses what to watch for in the school and village (photo right). The children are told to notice if another child stops attending school, or if a friend is suddenly missing. They are taught that when they see those things happen they need to inform their elders and teachers.

The most enthusiastic students in the 6th through 9th grades are invited to form a ***Child Vigilant Committee (CVC)*** in their schools. These are students that other, more timid students can approach with troubling information. The CVC students then decide whether or not to call the Childline hotline or to first talk with teachers or village elders. All over India people are being urged to call the Childline number on their cellphone if they see a child in danger.



School assemblies are an important part of the anti-trafficking campaign.



While other children play in the school yard, these concerned girls are forming a Child Vigilant Committee (left). Children discuss vigilance in a committee meeting (right).



School children perform a play for their village demonstrating how to recognize and stop traffickers.



School girls pose with Sister Regina, heroic organizer of the Prevention of Child Trafficking Program.

The team

Because most adults must work all day, the only time to reach them is in the evenings. The PCT team shows a movie featuring two young women who were rescued from traffickers. The women tell their story in the film and warn viewers about the tricks that traffickers use.

Posters are put up in a village announcing an open-air public meeting for a particular night. Because entertainment is almost non-existent in these villages (no movie theaters, very few televisions) the turnout for these events is large. The team brings a projector, screen and diesel generator to the event, along with posters and flyers.

After the movie is shown, team leaders lead a discussion about steps the people can take to protect their children.



Villagers watch a video with trafficked women who tell their stories.

Inter-village communication

Because traffickers move in and out of a village quickly, the team is creating communication networks between nearby villages. If a child is suddenly missing, calls are made to neighboring villages asking about any suspicious people or about frightened children seen accompanying an adult. Already this quick response network has allowed the PCT team to rescue girls from their traffickers.



Every village has a government nurse. Anti-trafficking posters are being placed in this clinic where the nurse can further explain how traffickers operate.



Education, awareness and community vigilance can end child trafficking.

A Heartbreaking Situation

(You may find these true stories difficult to read)

What is the price for a trafficked girl?



“It depends on the customers. Often the trafficked girls change many hands. Every point has its own price. At the place of their origin it is sometimes around Rs.10,000 (about \$139). This I came to know from some rescued victims. It is heart breaking to listen to their stories.” —Sister Regina

Sometimes the family is to blame

Sadly, not every trafficking incident is caused by a stranger—sometimes the girls’ families are complicit in the sale of their own children. In their most recent report, the sisters describe how four girls, aged 14 to 19, were tricked by their own uncle into accompanying him to a park where five men and three women were waiting to whisk the girls away.

The girls were taken to a rented apartment where they were raped and beaten. But the team learned about their abduction and alerted the police, who descended on the apartment and arrested the traffickers.

The team tried to return the girls to their families but that turned out to be very difficult. The uncle who had sold them was the deputy sarpanch (village leader) and a powerful man who threatened his own family if they reported him. The girls’ families were afraid of him and reluctant to press charges. It took a lot of persuasion to convince them to do that.

Some as young as five years old

“About a week ago, the news about the police raid of brothel homes in a district which is about 75 kilometers from our headquarters hit the headline of all the newspapers.

“According to the press report, the police raided several brothel homes and they rescued more than 40 girl children even as young as five years old. Most were trafficked from the nearby villages. It was established that these young children were injected with hormones to make them attain early puberty.

“Reading such reports was very painful and it is an anguish and a challenge to our team working to combat human trafficking.” —Sister Regina

Sunita’s rescue

A girl whom we will call Sunita was 14 years old and an orphan. She stopped going to school when her parents died and she went to live with her grandmother. But the grandmother was too old to properly care for Sunita and an aunt and uncle offered to care for the girl. Instead they forced her to become a prostitute at a bus station in their city.

The PCT team saw the girl and learned about her desperate situation. When they tried to rescue her the team was physically threatened by the girl’s aunt and uncle. With the help of police they rescued the girl and sent her to a government hostel where doctors discovered she was HIV-positive.

“It doubled our determination to work in all possible ways to raise awareness in the public and to protect each and every child in this region.” —Sister Regina

How a life was saved



Sister Regina (shown speaking with a Child Club) is the head of the PCT team. She told us this appalling story that illustrates just what they are up against.

Janaki (pseudonym) was an only child. But when she was just nine years old her mother and father got into an argument and both of them committed suicide. Her grandmother took Janaki into her own home where she lived for the next four years. But when Janaki was 13, her grandmother got very sick and was unable to work and earn money for the two of them.

Another relative visited and said she would take Janaki into her home if Janaki would agree to help her with some housework. The grandmother was not well and needed some financial support, so she agreed to the arrangement. Shortly after moving in with her relative Janaki was sold by the relative to someone from the state of Rajasthan in north India where child marriage and child trafficking are very common.

While she was being transported by the trafficker on a train, she managed to escape and got onto another train. She got off at the next railway station with no idea where she was or where she could go for help.

The railway police found her huddled against a wall, crying and frightened on the train station platform. They called Childline, a national child abuse hotline and social workers took Janaki back to her grandmother. But Janaki did not tell the social workers that she had been trafficked. They thought she was just a runaway.

The PCT team heard about her during one of their awareness programs in a school, where a teacher told them Janaki's story. The team visited Janaki's house and learned more about the terrifying events that took place in this young girl's life.

After counseling both the grandmother and the child, the team put Janaki in a residential school where she is studying in 9th grade. The school staff along with the PCT team have offered to send her for vocational training after she completes her schooling so she can be a self-sufficient young woman.

Janaki was lucky to be saved by the railway police and rehabilitated with the help of the PCT team.



During a school awareness program, like the one pictured above, the PCT team learned about Janaki.

Bhavani — raised in a brothel

This story may seem strange to many of you reading it. But it shows the lengths to which people will go to survive when they are suddenly thrust into utter poverty by circumstances beyond their control.

Bhavani's (pseudonym) story starts even before she was born. A very poor Indian couple were married for 10 years and never produced a child. The social pressure put on them by their neighbors and relatives was unbearable for them. People even suggested they were cursed. They decided to adopt a child, but the normal adoption process was complicated and not affordable. Instead, they asked people in their village to sell them an infant.

A tribal family had three daughters and agreed to sell their infant daughter for 150,000 rupees (about \$2,140). The sale was done secretly, but people in their village knew what had happened. They named their new daughter Bhavani. But after a few years Bhavani's father died of some illness, leaving his widow extremely impoverished with a child to raise on her own. To make matters worse, she was shunned by her own relatives because she had adopted a child from a lower caste.

Another woman in the community was a pimp who needed a house to use as her brothel. She convinced Bhavani's mother to turn her house into a brothel and was paid 500 rupees per day for doing that (about \$7). Bhavani knew what was happening in her own home. As she reached puberty, some of the customers asked her mother if they could pay for sex with Bhavani.

Often traffickers are not strangers but are relatives or people who are known to the trafficked child's family.

The PCT team learned of the situation and notified the police who raided the brothel. They took Bhavani, who was 12 years old, to the local Child Welfare Committee. The CWC placed Bhavani with her original biological parents. She is now attending school and social workers check on her regularly.

Often traffickers are not strangers but are relatives or people who are known to the trafficked child's family. The naiveté of desperate people is often stunning. But the PCT team comes into the villages armed with information that reduces their gullibility. (read more true stories of rescues on page 14)



The state of Telangana (where the PCT operates) had the third most trafficking incidents in India in 2017. —Trafficking in Persons Report USA

The PCT team took immediate action



World Day Against Trafficking

“In the backdrop of these sad and painful happenings, we organized the **World Day against Trafficking** event to raise awareness that was hosted by a tribal welfare high school.

“We took this opportunity to loop in the allied departments like the Police Department, District welfare officer, Child Welfare Committee, ChildLine team, etc.”

“There were several speakers on this issue of human trafficking. Some girls came forward to share some of their negative experiences both in the society and the family...”

“The children took an oath with full voice and determination vowed to protect themselves from all danger and harm by being assertive, vigilant, informed, cautious, taking all precautions to safeguard their life.”

—Sister Regina

“We resolved whole heartedly to combat human trafficking and promised the children that we will be at their side at any time in case of need and that they can count on us for their safety.”

—Sister Regina



Around
1,000 girls
enthusiastically
participated
in the event.

“I am very happy and grateful to you for the support you have been giving towards the human trafficking program in our area which is helping to save many innocent girls from being trafficked.” —Sister Regina



These February 2022 statistics indicate the progress of the Prevention of Child Trafficking Program since it began in April 2017.

Accomplishments Apr 2017—Feb 2022

153 victims have been rescued from trafficking and given support services.

130,985 villagers and children in 211 villages have been educated about trafficking

113,985 villagers have watched trafficking awareness videos in 241 villages.

16,800 children in 131 schools also have watched the videos.

473 women's self-help groups in 182 villages, comprised of 25,200 women, have met to discuss prevention of trafficking. They also identified 30 victims of domestic violence and helped rescue some of the trafficking victims.

182 Community Vigilant Committees have been formed. They have stopped over 50 child marriages and identified 182 dropouts. They have educated 136,500 community members.

131 Child Vigilant Clubs were formed with 1,310 children. Each group is comprised 10 students, one teacher, one PCT staff, and one member of Childline. Child Clubs identified 187 school dropouts. They also prevented 25 child marriages.

Other Groups—The PCT team also has worked with a variety of other parties affected by trafficking. They met with:

240 sex workers to motivate them to give up business and help them take up other occupations.

410 taxi, bus drivers and truckers are extending their support. These men frequently have provided the primary means of transportation for traffickers.

Over 350 professionals including police, school teachers, child protection, child welfare and rehabilitation services, revenue officers, village leaders, youth advocates and media personnel are extending their services to prevent trafficking and rehabilitate victims.

In one area, the number of trafficked children plummeted from 115 to almost zero.

We thank the PCT Team for their bravery and dedication to end child trafficking in India. We thank you for supporting them in this heroic endeavor.

Continuing the Prevention of Child Trafficking Program through 2023

~ With a blanket of watchful eyes, child trafficking can be prevented. ~

Expanding the program

The PCT team has been so successful with their education program that they asked us to help them continue for an additional three years and to move the program to another area of high trafficking activity.

They have worked in one district in the state of Telangana for the past three years. Now they plan to add two more districts. Each district is comparable to a county in the U.S. Last year government teams rescued 300 children in the two districts. Forty of the children were rescued from brothels.



A student speaks during a Child Club leadership training course.

We tend to think of traffickers as cunning men who kidnap or trick families in order to get children they can sell. And while that is often true, the roots of this problem are deeper than that. Many times a relative – even a parent – is willing to sell a child in order to make some money.

Thank you for helping to prevent girls and women from becoming victims of trafficking.



Child Club meeting



Mothers meet in this village to learn how to prevent trafficking.

How do they achieve so much success?

The highly successful plan to end child trafficking is really very simple.

Flood the area with information

Reach out to every person possible with a simple message about how traffickers operate. The PCT team talks to existing groups like women's self-help groups, village politicians, school assemblies. And they create new groups to combat trafficking.



Posters are placed in all the villages with simple to grasp illustrations about trafficking ploys.

Involve the community

Create a community of watchers.

Schools

In each school they identify 10 students who want to get involved and two or three teachers to lead them. These Child Vigilant Clubs watch for missing students and report their absence to their teachers who in turn alert the PCT team.

Community Vigilant Committees

These groups watch their villages and towns. They are trained to keep an eye out for strangers and if a frightened child is seen in a car the CVC will call to the next town where the road will be blocked and the car stopped for questioning.

Taxi and bus operators are visited and urged to watch for adults accompanying frightened children.

Educating through movies

Perhaps the most effective technique is the evening movies. There is little in the way of entertainment in remote villages. So when a movie night is announced, everyone attends. Using a diesel generator, video projector and screen the villagers are shown two videos featuring women who were trafficked and later rescued. They tell their harrowing stories in Telugu, the language in that part of India.



A thousand square mile safety zone



WC Operations Director Andy Gillihan and Executive Director David Purviance met with the PCT team while visiting India in February 2019. (photo above)

Never underestimate your ability to change a bad situation or correct an injustice. If you ever doubt your ability to do that, just remember the example of a group of six people, five of them women, who are effectively stopping child trafficking in their part of India.

These brave people aren't burly and they don't know any martial arts, nor do they carry weapons on their dangerous mission to put a halt to the third largest criminal activity in the world. They just want to protect children from the horrors of sexual slavery.

Thanks to your support the PCT team is finding success in their mission.

Without the funds many of you have given to this program, the PCT team would not have been able to educate 136,500 villagers and children. **Thanks to you, 153 victims were rescued from traffickers** and thousands of children and parents now understand how to prevent traffickers from stealing and buying children. Sister Regina and her team have created a prevention model that others can use.

How you can help

In order to keep a team in the field six days a week, costs include: five salaries, travel expenses, poster printing, equipment and supplies for showing videos. If you can give only five dollars, don't be dismayed.

Give whatever you can and share this info with your friends. Together let's put an end to child trafficking — at least in one part of the world.

Your \$5 donation might pay for 10 posters that are seen by several hundred people. And maybe one of your posters saves a child from being trafficked.

GIVE NOW

SHARE

www.worldschildren.org/trafficking-update

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www.worldschildren.org

www.facebook.com/WorldsChildren

More stories of rescued children

Shantha's Story

Shantha was a 13-year-old tribal girl who had an older sister and a younger brother. Her sister was married when she was 16 and her family had forced Shantha to drop out of school when she was in the 5th grade to help with housework. Her mother and father worked at a grain market as manual laborers. A woman named Kala also worked at the same grain market.

Kala visited in their home and when she saw Shantha she told Shantha's parents that she knew someone in the distant state of Rajasthan who was looking for domestic help. Kala said this man was willing to pay 100,000 rupees (\$1,428) in advance and that he promised to give her nice clothing, good food and shelter for doing a few hours of house work each day. Shantha was reluctant to travel so far away, since she had never even left her village before. But her parents made the choice to send Shantha with Kala, whom they only knew from work.

Kala took Shantha by train to distant Rajasthan, where nothing was what she had been told it would be. The man she was supposed to work for was 40 years old. He forced Shantha to marry him and then kept her in servitude. She was made to have sex with him and to work long hours. He frequently beat her and then decided she would have sex with other men. She tried to call her parents, but her "husband" watched her closely and never let her contact her parents.

Kala returned to Rajasthan and Shantha demanded to be taken to her parents for a visit. Kala agreed to let her have a short visit with her family. But as soon as they arrived back at her village Shantha escaped from Kala and ran to the local police station and explained what had happened to her. The police filed charges against Kala and the older man she was forced to marry. The PCT team was called and they took her to a shelter for rescued women. Shantha completed a tailoring course and is now living with her parents again and earning money as a seamstress.

Anika's Story

Anika is 11 years old and a member of a very poor family. They have a few sheep which they raise and that is their only income. Her family decided to take Anika out of school so she could tend their sheep every day. The teachers at her school tried to talk the parents into allowing Anika to continue her education, but they would not listen. Unknown to her parents, Anika was sexually molested by several men while she followed the sheep as they grazed.

During an awareness training class at Anika's former school, the children told the PCT team about Anika. Alarmed at what they heard was happening to her, the team called Childline and along with a social worker they visited Anika's home and learned she was out in the fields with their sheep. They found Anika and heard how she was being abused by men. The parents were told what was happening and agreed to let PCT place Anika in a residential school where she is safe and is now studying in the 8th grade.

Meera's Story

Meera was an only child of a poor family. Her father was a hired auto driver who died in an auto accident when Meera was just 18 months old. Her mother soon developed some illness and died just six months after husband had died. At two years old, Meera was an orphan. Her grandparents took little Meera into their home where she lived for several years. But her grandfather became ill and could no longer work. Her grandparents made Meera drop out of school and begin working in various homes doing housework. She was often physically abused and was not happy and wanted to continue her education.

While the PCT team was visiting her former school, Meera's classmates told them what had happened to their friend. The team visited Meera and her grandparents where the girl told them how she was being abused. The team convinced the grandparents to let them enroll Meera in school again and they offered to pay for her books, school uniform and other expenses.

Swetha's Story

Swetha is a 14-year-old tribal girl. Her father is a bonded laborer for a farmer and her mother does manual labor wherever she can find work. One day a relative came to visit the family and convinced Swetha's parents to allow the relative to take Swetha to a distant city where she would be married to a 35-year-old business man. The relative assured the family that Swetha would be well-cared for in her new mother-in-law's home. Further, the relative offered to give the family \$2,850 and some amount of gold if they allowed Swetha be married to this man. Swetha did not want to be married. She wanted to continue her education but her parents forced her to leave with the relative.

In the city where she was taken she was forced to marry the man and almost immediately the abuse began. She later reported that she was physically, sexually and emotionally abused by her husband and in-laws on a daily basis. At some point, Swetha was able to find a phone and she called her father and told him what was happening. Her parents had never received any of the promised money or gold and realized they had been duped by their relative. Her father took a train to the city and brought Swetha back to her village.

One day the PCT team was doing an awareness program in Swetha's village. They handed out cards to everybody in attendance with the Childline number on the card. One of the attendees called Childline the next day and reported what had happened to Swetha. Childline social workers, along with PCT staff and the police visited Swetha's home where she told them her story. The parents agreed to let Swetha live in a shelter home and continue her education. The police have filed charges against the relative and the man she was forced to marry.