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## Local News

# Human Trafficking in America, a cottage industry here

by Carol Sones Shetler

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### Photos



"Oasis of Hope" founder Debbie (seated) receives donations provided by members from the Ecyrud Missionary Circle following a presentation on the Human Trafficking of Children in America, held at the Friends Church, Hughesville.

Presenters were Sarah Harman (left) and Patty Stroup.

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HUGHESVILLE - "At any given time, 300,000 children are enslaved in the sex trade in America, it's a cottage industry driven by the internet," said Debbie Colton, founder of Oasis of Hope Ministries in North Central Pennsylvania.

"When we hear the words Human Trafficking, we think of countries such as Thailand or South America, but it's here in our back yard. Harrisburg was recently identified as the hot spot for the sex trade, and I know it's occurred in Williamsport," Colton said to members of Friends Church in Hughesville this past Saturday evening.

Unfortunately it's viewed as a victimless crime for both boys and girls whose ages range from 12 to 15. "There is a 10-year-old girl receiving help in a home in another state," she said.

Young victims are kidnapped, sold or traded for drugs by parents, or are runaways from their home and community. The latter are picked up at bus stations three to five minutes after arrival by pimps trained to recognize them. Most are drugged, the front of their brains beaten resulting in the loss of capabilities for long term planning. They just survive day to day serving 20 to 30 customers. They know that when they become too old, they'll mysteriously disappear.

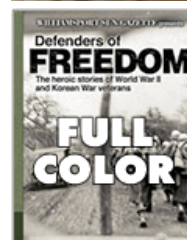
Adding to the complexity of the problem is the justice system which views these youngsters as prostitutes and charges them as such. Lobbying is being done in Harrisburg to convince the system to view them as victims and not as criminals according to Colton.

After 22 years in agriculture, Debbie and her husband made a career change by attending Bible College. Over the years they'd had seventy foster children in their home which gave them the opportunity to see the system from the inside, and learned it's not always stable.

With the knowledge that only 100 beds for minor girls and zero beds for boys rescued from the sex trade are available in the U.S., made the need to become involved, a burden on the couple's hearts.

Debbie's dream of a safe house for eight girls is nearing reality after being donated a structure. Volunteers have included renovators, a teacher for home schooling, and a physicist. So far they have promises of \$675 in monthly donations which is far short of monies needed. They're also seeking a couple to be house parents.

Licensed by the state as a group home with a board of directors, they'll not take government money. "It will be strictly 'faith based' so we can tell them about Jesus, read the Bible and have prayer. If they're rescued and not restored, what's the use," she said.

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The girls will come to them through the court system and the FBI will track pimps in an effort to secure safety for the home and inhabitants.

"Some will not want our help and we pray for discernment," Debbie said. Soon she'll go to Texas to receive training in helping sexually violated youth. Volunteers will train in workshops locally.

The "Oasis of Hope" was added to the list of missions regularly supported by Hughesville's Friends Church. At their recent banquet, the women of the Ecyrod Missionary Circle presented Colton with two hand made quilts and pillows, sheet sets and other useful items for the home.

Ladies of the missionary circle include Nancy Katherman, Mary Newhart, Lois Madorie, Sarah Harman, Elaine and Maxine Perritt, Patty Stroup and Marty Galligher.

Debbie is available to speak and present a power point program at churches, political functions, law enforcement agencies, children and youth agencies.

For more info or to help, contact the web site: [www.oasisofhopeusa.org](http://www.oasisofhopeusa.org) or e-mail [Debbiesoasis@gmail.com](mailto:Debbiesoasis@gmail.com). To learn more about Human Trafficking go to [www.sharedhope.org](http://www.sharedhope.org) or [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org). The national hotline for national human trafficking is 888-373-7888.

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