

LETTER from the President

Dear Friends,

Being a catalytic philanthropic leader means responding to emerging trends and issues. One such trend and issue in our state right now is the prostitution of adolescent girls. Our response? **MN Girls Are Not for Sale**, our new five-year, \$4 million campaign to end the sex trafficking of Minnesota girls.

Why have we taken this issue on now?

Our work to advance women's safety and security is where we receive the most requests for funding. Through this work, our grantee-partners informed us that Minnesota girls are being bought and sold for sex in increasingly alarming numbers, and law enforcement confirmed our grantees' concerns. Plus, early research of the issue found that during a 10-month period last year, the number of girls sold for sex in Minnesota online and through escort services increased by 166 percent.

To create a strategic, comprehensive blueprint to end the sex trafficking of Minnesota girls, we convened over 100 stakeholders representing advocates, funders, law enforcement, elected officials, the faith community, and more. We will continue to work in partnership with these groups for the duration of the campaign as we make grants, conduct research, advocate policy change, and educate the public.

Our grantee partners are the frontline leaders in this statewide work. One such leader is Shunu Shrestha, profiled in this issue.

To be successful in this work, we need you, too. Please visit www.MNGirlsNotForSale.org today and join us.

Together, we will ensure that all girls experience the world as a place of safety, and thrive. With your financial partnership, we can make it this vision a reality. Thank you for your continued partnership. It is deeply appreciated.




Lee Roper-Batker,
President & CEO

GRANTEE PROFILE | Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault

SHUNU SHRESTHA: Uniting the Community to Create Safety

by Katie Pierson

When Shunu Shrestha joined the Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault (PAVSA) in Duluth last year as its very first Trafficking and Prostitution Task Force Coordinator, the momentum among nonprofits, law enforcement and prosecutors for a coordinated response to help victims of prostitution and sex trafficking in the area was strong and growing.

For years, PAVSA had worked informally with prostituted and sex trafficked women and girls in southern St. Louis County and felt uniquely positioned to unite local efforts. In 2010, the organization received multi-year funding to do this work from the Women's Foundation of Minnesota.

Over the past year, Shunu has built a local task force to address the issue and is guiding them as they reframe the issue and identify service and systems gaps.

Growing up in Nepal taught Shunu important lessons about gender inequality. As a young girl, education in her family was encouraged, so she was fortunate to go to school with her brothers when most girls did not. For Shunu, this discrimination was unacceptable.

Those early experiences inspired her to fight now for women's safety and security, and equality. "This job is a perfect fit," she said. "And the time for this work is now."

In recent years, crisis centers and victims advocates in Duluth have witnessed an increase in the sex trafficking of women and girls, especially among American Indian women.

In Duluth, American Indian women make up a disproportionate number of people living below the poverty line, and are at the highest risk for sexual trafficking.



As coordinator of PAVSA's trafficking and prostitution task force, Shunu Shrestha is leading efforts in Duluth to reframe the issue and identify system and service gaps.

PAVSA works closely with the American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) and Fond Du Lac Band of Ojibwe. But hard data remains scarce, in part because most victims don't recognize themselves as victims.

Shunu explains that "pimping" or selling someone for sex — domestically or internationally — equals sex trafficking. And it's more common than most would think: when a young girl's boyfriend threatens violence unless she sleeps with other men for money, she's a victim of sex trafficking.

"The problems lie in the system — these children are not criminals, they're victims. Prostitution is a sexual violence issue, period."

Shunu — a former Women's Foundation fellow and intern — is a 2009 master's graduate of Columbia University's Human Rights program. She developed expertise

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DID YOU KNOW... The FBI ranks the Twin Cities among the nation's 13 largest centers in the country for the prostitution of adolescent girls. The average age a girl is first prostituted is 13, many young as 11. And through the ease and anonymity of the Internet, buyers are literally one mouse-click away from buying a child for sex.

Help end the sex trafficking of girls

www.MNGirlsNotForSale.org

A CAMPAIGN OF THE WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF MINNESOTA

- PAVSA, *continued...*

with coalition-building during her work with the Beyond Beijing Committee in Nepal.

That experience has paid off. In only 15 months, she's led a community-wide conversation and developed a core group of leaders who are translating grassroots concern into tangible action. It's not, however, a quick or straight-forward process.

"Working with a multi-disciplinary team is truly a tenuous process. Getting to consensus is challenging, but rewarding ultimately."

At the front-end of the process, Shunu met individually with nonprofit service providers, Duluth Police Department, St. Louis County Attorney's Office, Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, United States Coast Guard (Duluth), and University of MN-Duluth. Next, she reached out to core interest groups, including the League of Women Voters, faith communities, and professional women.

"In many respects, we were practically starting from scratch. We didn't even have shared language we agreed upon. This has all been part of our collective work to re-frame the issue."

She wasn't surprised to run into initial resistance to her multi-disciplinary approach. Basically, she's asking an entire city to re-think all of their assumptions about prostitution and sex trafficking, and the systemic forces that create a demand for it.

St. Louis County Attorney Mark Rubin is relieved to see this process move forward.

"I've been a prosecutor since 1978 and have tried cases like this with girls being exploited by adult men and taken to the Twin Cities for a week or a weekend," said Mark. "We see prostitution happening on ships in



St. Louis County Attorney Mark Rubin

the harbor. Some major cases have involved family members sexually exploiting their kids, making it hard to find supportive witnesses. These cases are not anecdotal. I've seen this close up."

Shunu said that

the real test of community support was how the public would react to the issue. Sixty people came to the first community meeting, all of whom had seen trafficking in one form or another.

A second community meeting produced a similar turnout. More importantly, it resulted in agreement to develop a common language around the sex trafficking of area women and girls.

"By the third and fourth meetings, community participation was so overwhelming that we had to restructure the task force. New people kept joining!"

Shunu was not surprised, because Duluth has a history of uniting around common community concerns. In the 1990's, for example, Duluth created an international model of improving community response to domestic violence. Safety and security for women and girls is a long-standing community priority.

The 2011 Legislature's passage of the Safe Harbor Bill in July reclassifies children age 15 and under who have been prostituted as "sexually exploited youth." Until the bill takes effect in 2014, prostituted juveniles can be simultaneously considered as juvenile delinquents to be criminally prosecuted or

as children in need of protective services. That's a lot of legal gray area for the state's sexually trafficked girls, most between ages 12 and 14. Nationally, seven other states have Safe Harbor laws.

"PAVSA played a pivotal role in the passage of Safe Harbor," said Mark. "They've been the catalyst that has brought key players together. When everyone in a group has their own agenda, it takes someone like Shunu to develop a coordinated response, and push for legislation."

PAVSA and AICHO provide the core leadership for the task force. A steering committee made up of leaders from key sectors of the community decides next steps and fields feedback from the larger community group.

For the Duluth task force, the next two years are about formalizing the response system: getting stakeholder organizations to hire and train staff, develop common protocols, and become more aware of other community resources. The goal is to ensure that all trafficking survivors have access to the same clear sequence of comprehensive resources.

Mark wants this sequence to include everything from careful data collection to helping trafficking victims safely and permanently leave the sex trade.

"This goes beyond managing a crisis — you have to get the child out of that environment completely so that they can restart their life," said Mark.

Learn more at www.pavsa.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Katie Pierson is a freelance writer, aspiring novelist, and public affairs consultant in Minnetonka.*