

**In the fight against human trafficking  
the Sisters of Benet Hill Monastery take a stand.  
Monday, May 2, 16  
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Deep in the Rocky Mountains lies a serene and peaceful enclave where hope for humanity is an unwavering passion within the hearts and minds of the sisters of the Benet Hill Monastery. Since their arrival in Colorado in 1914 the Benedictine women have both educated and empowered those around them firmly embracing their creed “To Seek God in community.” They have also embraced the directive of our Vatican II Church to actively address the “Issues of our Day” The sisters of Benet Hill incorporated this directive into their message of hope and education with the creation of an educational series on human trafficking in February of 2016. When the sisters learned of the spreading plague of human trafficking and the trail of broken lives and shattered hopes and dreams left in its wake they knew they had to act. Teaming up with the Human Trafficking Task Force of Southern Colorado the sisters of the Benet Hill Monastery created a four part series to educate and empower the community around them with the tools to combat modern day slavery.

The Department of Justice estimates that between 100,000 and 300,000 children are at risk of being trafficked in this country right now. Human trafficking is a \$9.5 billion a year business in the U.S. according to the United Nations and within the first forty-eight hours of leaving home, a runaway child will be approached by a human trafficker. Human trafficking is second only to the drug trade as the largest criminal enterprise according to the Justice Department. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports that pimps can make from \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year for each child. The NCMEC also reports a pimp has an average of four children and the Polaris Project, an anti-trafficking non profit, reports the average victim of sex trafficking is forced to have sex 20-48 times a day.

These numbers are shocking and part of a tragedy that is actively swallowing America’s children. The life of a child being trafficked is brutal. Drugs, alcohol, beatings and death threats are used as tools to keep innocent children as slaves to the depths of depravity. The Federal Bureau of Investigation reports the average life span of a child being trafficked is seven years. The drugs, alcohol and abusive lifestyle wither the fragile spirit of a child leaving them to die in the shadow of hope.

Our children are being thrown into the darkest abyss of humanity and some have been lost in a broken system. In 2010, Los Angeles officials reported that 59 percent of juveniles arrested for prostitution were in the foster care system. In addition, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reported that of the children who are reported missing, who are also likely sex trafficking victims, 60 percent were in foster care or group homes when they ran away.

In July of 2013, the FBI rescued 105 children who were forced into prostitution in the United States, and arrested 150 pimps in a series of raids in 76 American cities. The campaign, known as “Operation Cross Country,” was the largest of its type and conducted under the FBI’s “Innocence Lost” initiative. It all took place in just 72 hours. The youngest victim recovered was just 9 years old. (Reuters).

As a survivor of child sex trafficking, child abuse, and child pornography I was honored to be a speaker as part of the Benet Hill Monastery series on human trafficking

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Session 3: Survivor Stories. Following my mother's divorce from my biological father, her life began a downward spiral that left me abandoned and alone, vulnerable to those who prey upon the innocent. My mother's world existed at the bottom of a bottle and when she met a man named Neale who began to molest me, alcohol facilitated her complete escape from the reality of what was happening to me. Before long Neale shared me with the pedophile ring he belonged to. Soon I was being trafficked sexually, trapped by threats of violence against my mother and forced to take cocaine and alcohol.

For seven long years I was trapped in a hell no one deserves. I was nothing more than a shell of a human being enduring suffering and torture at the hands of psychopaths and sociopaths as the world looked on. I attended school, and from the outside appeared to be a "normal child" but I was being trafficked in plain sight. I was often pulled out of school to "service" clients and after school, holidays and weekends were all just a never-ending nightmare for me. All of the signs were there but no one cared enough to look or had the training or education to realize my bruises and lengthy illnesses were all red flags for a child suffering endless abuse.

I have dedicated my life to advocating for victims of human trafficking and to changing the lives of those affected by this vile scourge. I was humbled and honored by the response I received from all those who attended the Benet Hill Monastery series on human trafficking. I also wanted to thank Sister Rose Ann Barmann and everyone at Benet Hill Monastery for both their hospitality and their passion to bring an end to human trafficking. I also wanted to thank Betty Edwards, Chair Emeritus Human Trafficking Task Force of Southern Colorado and Detective Elli Reid, Colorado Springs Police Department Vice & Human Trafficking for their tireless dedication and unbridled passion to make a difference in the lives of all human trafficking survivors and victims. To learn more about how you can help save the next victim from a lifetime of pain and suffering visit the Human Trafficking Task Force of Southern Colorado website (<http://ht-colorado.org>), the Polaris Project website (<http://www.polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/recognizing-the-signs>) or contact the Benet Hill Monastery through their website (<http://www.benethillmonastery.org/#> ). An hour of CPR training can save the life of one person and an hour spent educating yourself about the signs of human trafficking and learning how you can get involved can save the lives of twenty. Please make a difference in the lives of the forgotten and lost in this world by showing them they matter and by joining together to be the change the world needs.