

Sex Trafficking Stories

Mari | Intimate Partner: With four children between them and a 16-year relationship, Mari couldn't imagine leaving Darrell. She didn't see any viable options, even though he was physically abusive and forced her into commercial sex when money was tight.

Mari is a 37-year-old African American woman who had been in a relationship with Darrell for 16 years. During that time Mari and Darrell had four children. Over the course of the relationship, Darrell had been verbally, physically and sexually abusive of Mari. Additionally, when Darrell wanted extra money, he called friends of his and forced Mari into commercial sex. She had tried to leave Darrell in the past; however, he either threatened to hurt their children, or convinced Mari that she had no other options other than staying with him. He controlled all of her money, did not allow her to keep her own bank account, and forbade her from getting her driver's license. Mari could not see any alternatives for leaving.

One evening, Darrell, Mari and an 18 year-old, Janice, who Darrell was also forcing into prostitution, were pulled over by a patrol officer for a traffic violation. The officer noticed that when Darrell pulled out his identification he had Mari's ID and the other girls' ID in his wallet. The officer was suspicious and asked to speak to them all privately. During his conversation the officer realized both women were being forced and coerced into prostitution. He referred both women to Polaris for emergency services. Polaris helped find temporary housing and provided food and clothing for both women. Janice immediately left Darrell and found a job in a restaurant. Mari relocated out of state with her children, but still struggles daily with her decision to leave Darrell. She understands that it is best for her and her children, and believes that more and more every day.

Sarah | Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: Sarah met a kind and generous older guy after running away from a broken home. But once she moved in with this new boyfriend, he forced her into commercial sex to pay his rent.

Sarah is a 17-year-old Caucasian female who grew up in rural Ohio. Sarah ran away from home a few times because her mom and stepfather drank a lot and did not pay attention to her. A few months ago Sarah was walking to the store alone and a 30-year-old male drove up beside her and told her how pretty she was and asked why she looked so sad. Sarah told him that she was angry with her mom and just needed to take a walk. He asked if he could take her to get her nails done down the street to cheer her up, and she agreed. He paid right away while giving compliments and telling her he wanted to meet again the next day.

For the next two months he picked Sarah up and took her to eat, to get her nails done and continued to act like a loving boyfriend. They both began calling each other boyfriend and girlfriend. They spent a lot of time together and he asked Sarah to move in with him, but after another month of living together he told her he couldn't make the rent payment and needed help. He asked her to go on dates with older men and engage in commercial sex. Sarah felt uncomfortable but agreed because she would do anything not to return home, and wanted to make him happy. Her boyfriend praised her and told her he didn't mind that Sarah helped them get money for rent this way. This continued until one night when Sarah

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was out on the street and was raped by a stranger who initially solicited her for sex. She immediately called the police and was taken to the hospital for an exam.

Once at the hospital, the responding detectives called Polaris client services and two staff members reported to the hospital. Polaris provided emergency housing and emotional support for Sarah as she considered some of her options. She decided to leave her boyfriend and move into a shelter. During her month at the shelter, Polaris found long-term housing for her and helped her secure a part-time job. Within four months, Sarah saved enough money to move into her own apartment. She continues to work part-time and attend classes in the evenings. She hopes to attend college next year and eventually own her own business.

Keisha | Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: After running away from her foster family at 14 due to sexual harassment, Keisha met an older man who offered to help her find her biological family. Then he forced her into commercial sex to pay him back.

Keisha is a 16-year-old African American female originally from Florida. She was raised by an aunt until she was 10 years old and then placed in the foster care system. At the age of 14, Keisha first ran away from her foster family to avoid sexual harassment from one of her foster family's relatives.

During that time, she met "Mastur D", a 26-year-old man who offered to help her get back to her biological family. He said he would be able to pay for some of the expenses to get them there, but that she needed to help support them financially by engaging in commercial sex with some of his friends. With no money or other options Keisha took him up on his offer. He drove her back to Florida but insisted when they arrived that she had not earned enough money to cover their hotel and gas costs. He physically assaulted her and told her she would never see anyone else in her family if she did not engage in sex with other men of his choosing. She felt she had no other choice and continued to earn money for Mastur D to pay him back for the money he paid for her to get back to Florida. Keisha was arrested for solicitation in Florida and after serving time in a juvenile detention center was returned to her foster family and was therefore returned to sexual harassment by her foster family's relative. Keisha ran away again a year later and called Mastur D to help her get back to Florida. He agreed to help again. She was arrested again.

While participating in an outreach group at a detention center, Keisha reached out to a Polaris social worker and told her parts of her story. Polaris immediately stepped in to provide emotional support and additional social services. The social worker helped Keisha talk to her case manager at the detention center about what happened and helped Keisha's probation officer understand other options for support instead of a detention center and returning to her foster family. Keisha now has an order of protection against Mastur D and was able to leave the detention center and go to an out-of-state residential program for young girls who were victims of sex trafficking. Keisha is doing well in her program and is almost finished with her GED.

Brittany | Escort Service Sex Trafficking: Brittany met a man at her local mall who offered her a job at his restaurant. Instead of working as a waitress, Brittany was forced to sell sex in a hotel room.

A man approached Brittany at a mall in her hometown, asked if she was looking for a job, and gave her a business card for a local restaurant he owned. When Brittany called the number on the card, the man confirmed that he was looking for waitresses to start working immediately. Brittany needed the job and asked for the restaurant's address, but the man told her he would pick her up at the mall where they first met. Instead of going to the restaurant, the man drove her to a nearby hotel and told her that she was going to be a prostitute instead of a waitress. At gunpoint, Brittany was forced to drink bottles of vodka and take blue pills that made her dizzy and disoriented. Brittany tried to look for help but was locked in the hotel room without access to a phone. After three days of being beaten, drugged, and forced to have sex with at least 60 men, Brittany managed to escape and asked the first car she saw to call the police. Polaris provided case management services to Brittany, and with time and a strong support system she was able to enroll in school.

Gabriella | Residential Brothel Sex Trafficking: Gabriella worked at a grocery store in Colombia. After moving to the United States in search of a better job, she was forced into prostitution by a person she trusted.

Several years ago, Gabriella lived in Colombia with her family and worked at a grocery store. As the eldest child, she had to provide for her mother and sisters after her father committed suicide. A childhood friend of Gabriella's moved to the United States some years before, and he offered to help her move to America every time he visited Columbia. He promised he would help her to find work in a restaurant so she could better support her family. After a year, she agreed.

The next thing she knew, Gabriella was taken to the U.S. and forced into prostitution. Not only was she held in debt bondage for \$10,000, but she was told that if she tried to escape, her family would be harmed. For five long years, Gabriella lived as the property of her traffickers. She was moved to a different brothel almost every week, never knew where she was, and wasn't able to seek outside help. Unfortunately, Gabriella's story is not unique. Polaris regularly assists victims of human trafficking who are left without homes, employment, family, or friends. Fortunately for Gabriella, Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) caught her trafficker. Gabriella was rescued through a raid that ICE did on the brothel where she was held. ICE referred her to Polaris for services.

Gabriella met with one of our case managers at least once a week for much needed emotional support and comprehensive care. Polaris assisted Gabriella in finding an apartment for her and her 2-year-old daughter, helped her enroll in ESL classes, and provided her with employment assistance.

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