



## Ex-Victim Help Teens To Quit Prostitution In The U.S.

By Camilla Costa, BBC Brasil September 12, 2011

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An American who was a victim of trafficking in women has become a volunteer organization that helps teenagers recovering former victims of prostitution.

In the NGO Living Water for Girls, which operates in Georgia, southeastern United States, Sara, now 31 years, follows the progress of girls 12 to 17 years trying to return to normal life.

\* Sara contacted the organization in early 2011, after being called to participate in a discussion with the organization's founder, Lisa Williams, a local radio station.

"I had never spoken openly about my story before, because they believed it was a victim. Just talking to Lisa got to admit publicly that I was kidnapped, threatened and forced to prostitute myself with a gun," he told BBC Brazil.

"I thought nobody would believe me when I was forced to say, it happened to me when I was 20." According to the U.S. Justice Department, about 200,000 children are exposed to situations of sexual exploitation in the country. The average age at which girls are recruited by the industry of prostitution is 13 years.

### Trap

In 2000, Sara had just left his son at ex-boyfriend's house and walked toward the subway stop when an older man in a car stopped beside her offering a ride.

Along the way, the man said he needed a break and invited Sara to break into a house next to the subway. Inside, he left her alone and shortly after, another man appeared.

"I was not afraid of the first man because he was older, but I knew that with the second, which was more tall and muscular, I could not fight," he recalls.

"He told me where my son's father lived, what he did and said that hurt. Then I discovered that this was a street where there were many girls addicted to drugs who prostituted themselves. The older man was a pimp recruiter this was the method they used. He said he knew I was over 18 years - until now do not know how he knew. "

Sara was forced to travel with the pimp for a prostitute. He took her back home periodically to visit his family, so that no suspicious and alerted police.

"The first time I traveled with him, he promised to return home after the weekend, it earned about \$ 4000. I only returned three weeks later," he says.

When her father, with whom she lived, and the ex-boyfriend, saying that she had a job for which you need to travel.

"The father of my son asked what I was doing and I was so ashamed he could not tell him. The pimp was waiting in the car with a gun during the visits."

### Flight

After about a year working as a prostitute, Sarah broke free of the pimp, and his pregnant after an abortion without his knowledge.

"When he found out, I hit a lot and only stopped because other people warned him that the police might come. I thought it was going to die and prayed for the first time," she says.

To escape, she went to work for drug dealers and even get into fights with other groups of prostitutes forced by traffickers.

In one of these clashes, a shootout that left dead attracted the attention of police who came to arrest them, leaving Sara and the other girls in the group independent. With nowhere to go, they went together into prostitution.

"The girls had become my family. If it was not God, I certainly would go from victim to victimizer. I could easily have become the pimp, which is something that happens to many women after the pimp out of the picture." In July 2011, Sara escaped from the place where he lived with other girls and returned to his father.

### New life

According to Lisa Williams, founder of Living Water for Girls, most of the girls come to your

organization after having been arrested by the police or rescue their parents.

"I started this project after I saw an article in a local newspaper about a 10 year old girl who was being accused of prostitution, along with his sister 11 years. They were found with shackles on their ankles," he says.

"They were victims and were being charged as if they were criminals. I was outraged." The offer of sex is a crime throughout the U.S., except in Nevada.

In 2008, Williams, a former soldier, raised money to buy a house where the girls receive medical and psychological treatment in addition to classes, for up to one year.

"If you put them back in an educational system where no one who could see them or look for them, they often turn to the pimp. They need to strengthen and understand that this should not be an option."

Upon returning to their families, to school or to college, the girls are accompanied by volunteers of the organization. Most mentors are women who were also victims of sex trafficking, as Sara. "When I got home, I fought for months against my depression. As I had finished elementary school, I tried to enter university. I went to church too, were the first things I did," she says. "I want to do things with the girls that I wish someone had done to me when I got out of life, and take me to the movies or a park, where you remember what it is to have fun and be young. Make them understand that are special and are not afraid to live. "

Ten years after escaping prostitution, Sara became marketing director in a company and see your child regularly. Once you get your financial independence, she married a boyfriend she met at church.

"When I talked to the girls for the first time they were very excited to see someone like them that he was on the other side, which I did," he recalls. \* Name has been changed to preserve the identity of the interviewee.