MISSION STATEMENT: End human trafficking through restoration, partnership, and prevention.

Willow provides individualized case management services for minor and adult sex trafficking victims in Uganda. Two residential facilities accommodate up to 36 girls and women at a time, and Willow continues to provide external case management services for Willow graduates. Willow allows survivors to recover in safety, receive tailored educational and skills training, work through the emotional tolls inflicted by their traffickers. Hundreds of girls and young women have benefited from Willow’s work since its founding in 2009.

BASIC FACTS:

Year Founded: 2009
Home Office Location: Orange, California
Work Location: Kampala, Uganda
Type of Work: Aftercare for Adult & Minor Sex Trafficking Survivors
Website: http://willowintl.org
Social Media: @WillowIntl

Key Leaders:
- Kelsey Galaway, Executive Director
- Reza Jahangiri, Board Chair
- Joylyn Edwards, Country Director
- Lillian Ayella, Program Director
- Pauline Amony, Operations Director
WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT YOUR WORK?
The importance of “family” saturates Willow’s approach. When it is safe and possible, our team works to reunite survivors with their families so they will have the support they need. But in many ways, Willow becomes the survivor’s extended family and provides healthy connections and community. This family environment allows Willow to tailor its services to the unique needs, abilities, and interests of each survivor. There is nothing cookie-cutter about Willow’s work. Every case is different. Every survivor is unique. Operating like a family builds strong bonds and has created an atmosphere where scores of Willow graduates return regularly for parties, gatherings, and to mentor other survivors living in the residential homes.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?
The government does very little to help human trafficking victims, even though there is a good law on the books. There is no specialized investigative unit and going to court is a terrible experience for our girls because the government doesn’t treat them well.

WHAT DO YOU WISH PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT THE REALITY OF TRAFFICKING?
Human trafficking is not always the dramatized thing you see in the movies. Rescuing is not glamorous. In our experience, victims are not locked up. They are physically free to walk around because their traffickers have found other ways to force them. The movies focus too much on rescue. The reality is that there is a lot of important police work before and after the rescue, and once they are free the work of aftercare really begins.

HOW DO YOU INTERACT WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT & PROSECUTORS?
At Willow, we try to work with the police whenever we can. The reality is that out of the hundreds of survivors Willow cares for, only one of their traffickers was ever convicted of a crime. That means that over 99% of our survivors don’t deal with the police because the police never stopped their traffickers. The traffickers have likely moved on to new victims. When survivors attend court, they do not have a good experience. Recently, a judge called one of them a liar and the congregation in the gallery laughed at the survivor. We work closely with the human trafficking coordinator at the police who does a very good job, but most of the police don’t understand how to deal with human trafficking victims.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?
The staff and the survivors give me hope. The staff is so dedicated and they consistently show up for work even though it is hard. The survivors themselves also give me hope. Watching them live out their lives, go back to school, graduate, and have families inspires me. They are resilient. Hope comes from knowing that the crime of human trafficking is not the end for the survivors.

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