

‘It’s because of this that I must!’

The Institute for Shelter Care is raising leaders to help survivors of sexual exploitation.



BY ANNE REED

It all started with Jeanne Allert. In 2007 she was at the top of her game, in her 14th year managing a successful internet consulting firm working with trade and professional societies in Washington, D.C.

She had given her life to Christ three years earlier, and her lifestyle of extravagant purchases, extensive travel, and exorbitant income had lost its appeal. God had been preparing her, and her life was about to change dramatically.

During a statewide conference where Allert was speaking, a young man was prompted by the Holy Spirit to invite her to join him and his church at a street outreach in Baltimore, Maryland. Though she was initially caught off guard by the unexpected invitation, she couldn't get it off her mind.

“A couple of weeks later, I decided to go,” Allert told *AFA Journal*. “I walked up to this Korean church and got into a van with Korean lettering. We drove to downtown Baltimore, to a Black neighborhood where all the exploited women on the streets were White.”

As a woman accustomed to wearing business attire and associating with D.C. professionals, she didn't exactly blend in with the poverty-stricken surroundings of the Baltimore neighborhood.

“But I found these people to be absolutely incredible,” she said. “They were doing something I had never seen before. Their love, compassion, and generosity of spirit towards these women on the street compelled me to keep going [back to the street outreach].”

Life altering encounter

During one of the outreaches – a carnival with free food, clothing, and children's activities – she noticed a young lady walking down the street.

“The whole block was chaotic, but the world froze when I saw this 90-pound girl,” Allert recalled. “And the Lord spoke and said, ‘Go talk to her.’”

The two sat on a stoop and talked for hours. Her name was Heather, and she introduced Allert to the dark, disturbing underground world of sex trafficking. Three hours later, as the buses loaded, Allert had to tear herself away from the young woman who had captured her heart.

But Allert was an emotionally strong woman. She pulled herself together and resolved to return to life as normal.

“As I was washing dishes that night, my knees buckled, and I fell to the floor,” she said. “I went out to my porch, and I was hanging on the rails and bawling.”

Concerned for her mom, Allert's daughter came out and insisted, “Mom, you're never going out there again!”

“It's because of this that I must!” Allert exclaimed.

The Samaritan Women is born

That same year, Allert founded The Samaritan Women (TSW), a faith-based restorative care home –

a safe place where women traumatized by sexual exploitation could be removed from the crushing threat of violence and oppression and begin to heal.

“I never planned to do this work,” she said. “I had no preparation for it. I learned from the women in the program.” What followed was a challenging journey of exploration, disappointments, and celebrations.

A lifelong learner, Allert sought out quality research that would inform TSW on how to best serve its residents. In her search, she realized how little information existed. So TSW conducted its own research and produced the National Practices Survey Report 2017: A Survey of Residential Service Providers for Victims of Domestic Human Trafficking.

Institute for Shelter Care expands reach

Allert could not shake off the burden she carried after discovering severe gaps in service and quality for victims of sexual



Jeanne Allert



Kim Checkeye

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KIM CHECKEYE

exploitation. So in 2018 the TSW board made a tough decision and expanded its efforts beyond its single residential program to establish Institute for Shelter Care (TSW-ISC) with a vision “that any survivor, anywhere in the nation, would have access to qualified, compassionate care.”

With Allert serving as the visionary founder and executive director, TSW-ISC now accomplishes its mission of advancing quality care for sexually exploited persons through transformative residential care programs, collaborative research, and supportive mentorship.

The first shelter mentorship program was piloted in 2019 as a one-year intensive training in the basics of starting a shelter from the ground up. Once accepted into the program, mentees are guided through the process as they open the doors of their shelter and begin serving exploited people.

TSW-ISC continues to guide and consult mentees on a long-term basis, providing ongoing educational resources on breakthroughs and innovations experienced in shelter care.

Battle ready

“We are here to make our mentees battle ready!” explained Allert. “My goal is to push the mentees as hard as I possibly can. What we do during this training is nothing! It’s a cakewalk in comparison to what our mentees will go through in shelter care work.”

“When you are literally flat on the floor, and you are bawling and wading in snot saying, ‘I can’t go one more minute, I will pick you up,’ Allert asserted. “And I will yell at you that you *can* get up, and you *will* get up.”

“I thought I walked in faith until I became an executive director for a residential program,” said Kim Checkeye, now serving as director of the TSW-ISC shelter care mentorship program. “I had no idea what walking by faith was until then.”

“When you see what one human being can do to another person, you absolutely lose hope in humanity. But God loves the buyers and traffickers just as much as He loves the women. That is a true wrestling match. I still wrestle with that today.”

The church’s call

Allert and Checkeye both admit they have struggled with anger as they have watched Christ’s church fall short in responding to the need. That discontent led TSW-ISC to develop The Shepherd Project a new component that educates and equips the church to respond. (See sidebar.)

“In this ministry, you have a moment of life and death every day,” said Allert. “Sometimes it’s literal death, and it’s often spiritual death. ... This ministry has made me more aware of Christ – the sacrificial Christ – the suffering servant Christ. ... I have a greater sense of urgency about the world, about the imperative of the gospel. Before this, evangelism was always someone else’s responsibility.”

It’s because of this that *the body of Christ* must ... rise up and answer God’s call to reach out with the gospel of salvation, with help, hope, and healing to the victims of sexual exploitation. [afa](#)

Below top to bottom: Jeanne Allert teaches the spring 2021 mentoring session. The home of Institute for Shelter Care.

The Shepherd Project

“The Shepherd Project was really an initiative to get churches to go from awareness to action,” explained Jasmyne Cummings, TSW-ISC church impact manager. “But it also offers a deeper awareness of the contributing factors.”

“If we want to get serious about this, we need to start talking about these issues. We need to start having uncomfortable conversations.”

In its efforts to de-stigmatize conversations, prevent future abuse, and help others create a healing refuge, The Shepherd Project focuses on four areas and how they are interwoven:

- child abuse
- sexual assault
- pornography
- sex trafficking

Throughout 2021, expert speakers are addressing these topics via monthly virtual trainings. Individuals and churches are invited to attend and discern how to put resources and essential practices into action.

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