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Non-profit is trying to end human trafficking

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October 13, 2011 (CHICAGO) (WLS) -- Twelve years ago, Lia Valero spent time working in Cambodia as a volunteer for the Peace Corps. What she saw there had a permanent impact. Now, she has started Stop Traffick, a non-profit organization to help stop human trafficking in Chicago and abroad. It's how she shows her "spirit of giving."

It is these faces of the children that keep Valero motivated. These children live in a Cambodian orphanage called Goutte D'eau. It specializes in rescuing children who were victims of human trafficking. One little girl lost her eye after an infection went untreated. She was then reportedly sold into a begging ring.

"I witnessed firsthand victims of human trafficking, and I didn't have any idea at the time what was going on and then later I put it together," said Valero.

Valero set out on a mission to help. Six years ago, she started Malia Designs, a fair trade company that sells purses and accessories made by women in Cambodia who were victims or are at risk of human trafficking. She then donates part of the profits back to the women's' groups.

"By providing a job, it effectively can trickle down to the children as well, so the children are less likely to become victims," said Valero.

Valero still wanted to do more. So she started Stop Traffick, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness and funds to help victims in Southeast Asia as well as in Chicago.

This year, Valero has partnered with the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation. That organization focuses on ending the demand for prostitution by educating the public and lobbying for laws that stiffen punishment for solicitors.

"Without people willing to buy commercial sex, there would be no commercial sexual exploitation," said Lynne Johnson, Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation. "We're trying to reduce the exploitation of human beings by holding the people who are doing it accountable and that's the same principal and logic that's applied whether we're talking about an international trafficking ring or a local pimp who is recruiting girls on the West Side."

Stop Traffick is hosting its third annual fundraiser on Saturday, October 22, at Intuit Gallery. You can find ticket information at:

<http://stoptraffickbenefit.eventbrite.com>.

www.gouttedeau.org

www.caase.org
www.maliadesigns.com

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