

STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

One of the best ways to say thank you and demonstrate the profound impact the work of IJM has for its clients is to simply tell stories – stories of restoration and renewed hope for those who are suffering under violence. We hope you are encouraged by this story of a new kind of Christmas for victims rescued from sex trafficking in 2012.

CEBU, THE PHILIPPINES – Three girls who had been trafficked and routinely sold for sex were rescued late last week in an undercover operation. The girls shared similar stories: all came from extremely impoverished families. The youngest was only 14 years old. What had started out like so many other dark nights on the Cebu streets ended with a new beginning.

IJM Cebu assisted the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) with the rescue on December 5, providing logistical support leading up to the operation and on-the-ground expertise that night. As NBI officers arrested the suspected trafficker, other police officers and IJM staff escorted the trafficking survivors to the government shelter where they received immediate crisis care.

At the shelter for trafficking survivors, the girls started to open up about the abuse they had endured. One 17-year-old said she had met the trafficker a year ago at school. He befriended her and told her she was pretty, eventually inviting her to a party. She went, and it was there that she was first sold for sex. That night, the man who intended to exploit her took her to a hotel. She managed to escape, but it wasn't the last time the pimp would sell her. She grew quieter as she recounted more. She said she had been sold to more than half a dozen other men over the course of the year.

Another girl explained how she had grown up living in a makeshift community, literally inside the city dump. All of the girls rescued that night had dropped out of high school, citing financial reasons – and fear. One of the girls said she wanted to go back to school, but she was afraid of the “gangsters,” afraid of getting hurt again.

The trafficking survivors spent the night at the shelter, mostly quiet in between answering questions and talking or playing card games with one another. But the next day they were watching TV, and a Christmas special started playing carols. Suddenly uninhibited, the girls started singing along.

“It was a beautiful moment because it was so simple,” explained one of the IJM team members helping provide crisis care, “While we sang the Christmas song, I saw hope flicker in their eyes and joy gleam across their smiles. And I couldn't help but wonder how this Christmas might be different than the others they had celebrated; this Christmas, they were given the gift of freedom.”



On the night they were rescued from trafficking, the high school-aged girls shared their stories with IJM and government social workers. They played games and spent the night in a safe shelter.

