MARGINAL VOICES: from vulnerability to visibility

Women trafficked into the UK

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“I managed to escape and run to a police station. I was terrified. I told the officer that I was being held as a slave by a woman in a house nearby; that I had been living there since I was 12 – that I was beaten and abused. He said that because I was only 16, they could not deal with my case but he didn’t really believe me.” Marginal Voices participant

Overview of Marginal Voices

Marginal Voices is an advocacy project specially designed for women who have been trafficked into prostitution and domestic slavery. It aims to enable former victims of trafficking to position themselves as experts: transforming their traumatic experiences into positive change by raising public awareness through participatory theatre performances and by delivering sensitisation trainings to front-line professionals working with victims of trafficking. Marginal Voices strength lies in using theatre as a powerful agent to provoke social change. Through the medium of theatre, participants have been taught performance skills and given the opportunity to tell their stories in their own words.

“we’ve been there – we know what it’s like – we can help others” MV participant

The Marginal Voices project is designed to address some of the problems highlighted in the recent document: ‘It Happens Here’ published on 11th March 2013 by the Centre for Social Justice, which found “unacceptable levels of ignorance” among police, social services and the UK Border Agency. It places victims and their needs at the heart of the project, in line with recommendations from the government’s strategy on human trafficking (published in July 2011, which states that: “Victim care is central to our approach to combating trafficking through providing identified trafficking victims with the proper support needed”.

History of Marginal Voices

Marginal Voices began in December 2009 with 10 women (from the POPPY Project) from nine countries, all of whom arrived in the UK as victims of trafficking and abuse. Since then, there have been four further training periods, during which participants have been empowered to articulate their experiences of being trafficked and the lack of effective services on offer to those who do manage to escape. Each phase culminated in showcasing highlights of the work, based on their personal experiences. The project has proven that Marginal Voices not only has the power to transform the lives of its participants, but also to raise awareness about human trafficking.
Last year the participants voiced their desire to (a) work together to develop sensitisation workshops that they would like to deliver to professionals working with former victims of trafficking and (b) stage and perform a play based on their own experiences about their daily struggle to rebuild their lives after trafficking. With this in mind, award-winning playwright, Bola Agbaje has been working alongside the director and five of the original women to write a powerful new play that will include interactive audience participation.

**WHAT NEXT: September/October 2013**

Marginal Voices has been invited to partner with the well-established Oval House Theatre Participation Department in a Festival of Human Rights work in early September, during which time they will showcase 3 performances of scenes from their new play featuring 5 of the original Marginal Voices participants and 2 professional actors. Using interactive theatre techniques, the spectators will be encouraged to enter into dialogue with characters in the play and to step into their shoes helping to find constructive solutions to challenging problems.

This is an extraordinary opportunity for the project to gain an unprecedented amount of publicity and to reach new audiences.

In October 2013 these performances will be followed by four sensitisation training workshops designed for professionals working in a variety of trafficking support agencies. These workshops will be led by the Artistic Director and women from Marginal Voices.

**PLANS FOR THE FUTURE: 2014 – 16**

January 2014 - To establish a 3 year training programme to enable Marginal Voices participants to:

- lead their own sensitisation trainings for professionals working in fields related to human trafficking and modern day slavery, including police, criminal justice and social services
- recruit new intakes of former victims of trafficking and share their skills with them
- train and empower another 60 former victims of trafficking

**MARGINAL VOICES IN ACTION**

Riposte Pictures - Karen Martinez, a film director from Riposte Pictures, continues to document the extraordinary evolving journey of the Marginal Voices Theatre project as it unfolds stage by stage, following the women as they continue making their way through this unique creative process. She intends to produce a feature-length documentary, creating a compelling record of the journey of the Marginal Voices Theatre Project and its participants.

To watch a short film about Marginal Voices please log onto: [http://vimeo.com/21393230](http://vimeo.com/21393230)

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