



unseen

IN FOCUS

15 years of
fighting slavery



SURVIVORS GO TO PARLIAMENT | CARE SECTOR CRISIS |
A CASEWORKER'S LIFE | SLAVERY IN NUMBERS

welcome



Beth Lee
Editor

Welcome to the 2023-24 issue of your Unseen in Focus magazine, where we lift the lid on our work towards a world without slavery. This is a special year for Unseen, as we mark 15 years of fighting exploitation together: read about how it all began on page 4. But despite the progress we've made and the thousands of lives we've changed for the better, the need for our work is more important than ever, as the increase in calls to our Helpline so plainly shows (see page 8). I'm proud to be part of this important work. I hope, in reading this magazine, that you are equally proud to be a supporter. Thank you.

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contact us

0303 040 2888

info@unseenuk.org

Speak to

Our Survivor
Consultants ensure
people with lived
experience inform
the work of Unseen



ing truth power

It's been an interesting summer for Unseen's Survivor Consultants, a group of individuals with lived experience of modern slavery and exploitation. In July, some members of the group travelled to Westminster to give evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee's human trafficking inquiry (pictured).

The Committee is assessing the scale of trafficking in the UK, the forms it takes, and what can be done to help prevent it, increase prosecutions and protect victims. Unseen submitted written evidence earlier in the year, and this time round, the consultants gave verbal evidence on the importance of survivor inclusion in modern slavery policy.

The Group has also met MPs and key people from many different organisations working on responses to modern slavery.

The idea behind the Survivor Consultants Group is about ensuring people with lived experience inform the work of Unseen, and that their insights can help find solutions to identify and prevent situations of exploitation.

The project is currently supported by a generous grant from the Hilton UK Foundation. Some Survivor Consultants, for example, are currently working with our Policy & Research team on Unseen's contribution to a report on the links between modern slavery and climate change. This is in conjunction with three UK universities and likely to be published in early 2024.

The Consultants initiative, which has been running for just over a year, also looks to provide survivors with work experience and training, to help them move into permanent employment when they are ready.

A few members of the initial group have already moved on to paid work. Another says: "I feel lucky to be part of Unseen because here I have touched the real life with real people who make you feel free to share your own opinion."

ORIGINS



Staff, with Unseen CEO Andrew Wallis holding the T, send a message to supporters



in the beginning

This year Unseen marks 15 years of fighting modern slavery. So how did it all start? We talk to Unseen CEO and co-founder Andrew Wallis

“I was vaguely aware of the issue of trafficking,” says Unseen CEO Andrew Wallis; “and by vague, I think I’d seen a drama on TV called Sex Trafficking.”

“It was nothing more than that though – an interesting drama, move on.”

But a conversation with a colleague about their recent trip to Ukraine planted another seed in Andrew’s mind.

“He told me how he’d stopped a woman being trafficked.”

The woman had approached Andrew’s colleague and his friends, thinking they were the people she was meant to meet – her traffickers. “She was responding to an ad, a job in New York selling ice cream. It would pay her \$80,000.”

In the group was an ex-FBI agent who told the woman this was a trap.

“‘If you meet those people, take that flight, you will end up in a human trafficking situation’, he told her.”

The woman agreed not to go, but said she had spent \$600 on flights and had nothing to get home. She had seen the ad as an opportunity to provide for her family. So the group agreed to reimburse her, but before she could leave, her traffickers arrived.

“There was a conversation where they ended up having to buy the woman off the traffickers,” says Andrew. The group’s departing words to her were: “Never again respond to these adverts. It’s really, really risky.”

Andrew says he was shocked by this story, even more so when he heard another tale of modern slavery just months later.

Kate Garbers, a friend and subsequent co-founder of Unseen, was working in a Ukrainian orphanage during the summer of 2007.

“Kate came back and said, what I’ve discovered has really disturbed me,” Andrew recalls. “When these kids get kicked out at 16, the people at the gates of these orphanages are traffickers – and literally some of these kids will get into the back of those cars and they’re never seen again.”

Within a few short months, Andrew had listened to two stories of trafficking – but even then he “hadn’t joined the dots”. This didn’t happen until he read an article naming Bristol Airport as being used to traffic people from Eastern Europe to the US.

Andrew, who has lived in Bristol since 1995, realised that modern slavery was a global issue, not limited to Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the US or UK – and not enough was being done to address it.

He then wrote a letter to local MPs, Bristol City Council and the Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police, asking what, if anything, the church of which he was a member could do to help tackle the problem locally?

This led to Steve Jeffries, a Senior Police Officer, requesting a meeting. According to Steve, all the police could do for potential victims was arrest them under immigration crimes or put them in a hotel for safety – but victims would disappear, to go straight back to their traffickers and then be moved to another part of the country.

“At the end of that conversation, Steve said, any idiot can write a letter that creates a stink – but what are you actually going to do about the problem?” says Andrew.

“I stupidly said: ‘What do you need?’”

The answer was a safe place for potential victims of modern slavery – a safehouse.

Andrew agreed that he would try to organise something on one condition: that Steve was the first trustee of the charity he would need to set up.

And so Unseen was born.

“Was Unseen thought out? Meticulously planned?” says Andrew. The answer is no. “It was a gut response to a problem.

“I think people give up too easily. For me, it’s about internal motivation and a commitment to trying to bring some justice.

“We knew that what we didn’t want to do is create something that’s just about a safety net. From day one we said, ‘We need to do what’s immediately in front of us, but simultaneously we need to start addressing how we turn the tap off.’”

Reflecting on his hopes for Unseen at its conception and at present, Andrew says the goals have not changed.

“Our overall objective is to put ourselves out of business,” he says. “What does that look like? A world without slavery.”

Thanks to your support, Unseen has been fighting slavery for 15 years.

Check out our interactive timeline at unseenuk.org/about-us/unseen-history or scan the QR code



who cares?

Labour abuse in the care sector is rocketing, according to the latest figures from our Helpline. Why is this happening and what's to be done?

It's the end of the week in late July and things aren't slowing down at the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline.

A story has just run across the BBC network about a huge leap in numbers of workers being exploited in the care sector.

The article has the potential to be seen by millions of people, some of which are now in touch with the Helpline to report their concerns.

"That weekend was definitely our busiest of the year," says Natasha Mitra, Head of Helpline Services. From January to March 2023, 109 reports had been made to the Helpline concerning the care sector – that's more than double the figure for the same period the previous year.

Meanwhile, for the whole of 2022 the number of potential victims reported to the Helpline who were working in care increased from 63 in 2021 to 708. That's a mind-boggling annual jump of more than 1,000%.

"It's no secret that there are a huge number of vacancies in the care sector," Natasha explains. "So to help plug the gap, the Government has made it easier for overseas social care staff to work in the UK, providing them with special skilled worker visas."

But while international recruitment has been billed as a solution, it has also brought with it its own problems.

In one case, more than eight potential victims working for one company came forward to the Helpline.

The workers had come to the UK from various countries in Africa and Asia on the promise of full-time employment and complementary accommodation.

They had also been asked to sign contracts stating that if they left the company within three years, they would have to repay £6,000 to the company.

Once in the UK, however, the promised accommodation did not materialise. Some workers who were unable to find anywhere to live were offered one week's accommodation, but this had no heating, and they soon had to move on anyway.

Unable to afford rent, the workers had been loaned money by the exploiter, which put them in a situation of debt bondage with their exploiter. Similarly, they had been loaned money to buy a car for their jobs. The workers told the Helpline that they were expected to drive between clients but were not reimbursed for their mileage. Neither were they covered by any company car insurance.

Plus, they were expected to work on their days off to cover shifts and to work when they were unwell. If anyone complained, the company threatened to report them to the Home Office and have them deported.

"Overseas workers in such situations typically don't know their rights," says Natasha, "so once we were contacted, we immediately referred the matter to the police."

This can then lead to workers being referred into the National Referral Mechanism, Natasha explains, which is the Government system for supporting victims of modern slavery. It can mean fines for the company involved or even its operating licence being revoked.

"The main thing is that these workers, many of them in a strange country and with no one to turn to, have some way of getting support and are able to get out of harmful situations," says Natasha.

Another day at the office for the Helpline team.

Read more about the issues in the care sector on our website by searching "Unseen UK care sector".



Overseas
recruitment
was billed as a
solution – but
has caused
massive problems

slavery in numbers

What does the modern slavery landscape look like? Here is a snapshot of some of the latest annual figures, and detail on the rise of sexual exploitation

The numbers just get bigger and bigger. 2022 was the busiest year ever for Unseen's Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline, with calls and contacts approaching the 10,000 mark.

Modern slavery cases raised have increased by 70% on the previous year to 2,588, while the number of potential victims indicated has hit 6,516, a rise of 116% (a case can include several potential victims, hence the discrepancy in numbers).

The care sector saw an increase in potential victims indicated of over 1,000% (see page 6); and a 75% increase in domestic servitude cases raised, where people are forced to work as servants in a home.

These numbers are the most up-to-date annual figures from Unseen's Helpline Annual Assessment, which is a go-to source of stats and analysis for anyone working to prevent modern slavery in the UK.

Police, policy makers, fellow charities and businesses all use Helpline insights to inform their work fighting exploitation. A report from our data team to a business, for example, can help the business understand where abuse might be happening in their supply chains.

In some ways more reporting to our Helpline is to be welcomed.

Experts estimate there are around 100,000 victims of modern slavery at any one time in the UK, so the more of these that come to light through the Helpline, the better.

But of course, just one victim of modern slavery is one victim too many.

A type of slavery that shows no signs of slowing down, according to figures from our Helpline, is sexual exploitation. This is where individuals are coerced into sex work or performing sexual acts.

For the fourth year running, in 2022 the Helpline documented a record number of modern slavery cases – see column , right.

This kind of insight does not exist anywhere outside of Government. It is why Unseen's Helpline is such an essential tool in the fight against exploitation.

And it's thanks to supporters like you that it continues to be that way.

You can drill down into more exploitation data from the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline on our website at unseenuk.org/helpline-statistics

Just one victim
of slavery is one
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sexual exploitation – insights from the Helpline

In 2022:

- The Helpline recorded **479 cases of sexual exploitation**, representing a **66% increase** on the previous year
- This made up **19% of total modern slavery cases**.
- Our data pointed to potential exploiters and victims often having **no pre-existing relationship**.
- Some cases, however, can involve exploitation by a partner, family member, employer, or even a recruiter.
- We found most exploiters to be male, and the prevalence of male potential exploiters indicated is higher in sexual exploitation cases compared to overall modern slavery cases.
- **Sexual abuse is also a common method of control**, but victims have also reported experiencing confinement, tied accommodation, financial control, monitoring and physical abuse.
- Historically, **Romanian nationals** are the most frequently indicated nationality among potential victims of sexual exploitation.
- However, the most recent annual data shows that **Thai nationals** had the highest representation of potential victims of sexual exploitation, **with an increase of 880%**.



payroll giving an easy way to support Unseen

Did you know that supporting your chosen charity through Payroll Giving is one of the most tax-efficient ways of donating?

You can help Unseen support some of the estimated 100,000 people trapped in modern slavery in the UK through a regular gift, taken from your salary before tax – so a gift of £20 costs just £16 as a 20% tax rate payer.

With your support, we're able to provide vital services to help people affected by modern slavery rebuild their lives.

Ask your HR department to add Unseen to your company's Payroll Giving scheme. If they don't have one, you can register your interest via the link below and we'll get in touch about how you can support the most vulnerable through our Payroll Giving scheme:

Register your interest for Payroll Giving by scanning the QR code, or by going to the following link:
bit.ly/unseenpayrollgiving



“Burgess Salmon are proud to support and operate a Payroll Giving scheme through which employees can make easy and tax-efficient regular charitable donations to charities from their pay”

Sarah Hamnett, CR Specialist, Burgess Salmon





a day in the life of... ...a caseworker

Tom is a Senior Caseworker at Unseen, where he helps survivors of modern slavery rebuild their lives and move on from the traumas they have experienced. His work includes ensuring survivors have access to essential services, and fair treatment and support from authorities. Read about a typical day for Tom as he shares his inspiration, the challenges of the job, and everything in between.

How did you become a Caseworker?

I was working as a mental health support worker when I came across the role. Although I didn't know anything about modern slavery, the more I read about Unseen, the more I was impressed. Becoming a Caseworker allowed me to continue working directly with people, something I found fulfilling, while tackling intriguing challenges.

Where do you work?

Primarily from the main office in Bristol or our safehouses, but also with clients in the community.

What are your main responsibilities?

I check in with clients to ensure their wellbeing, liaise with professionals on their behalf, including GPs, solicitors and local authorities, and engage in advocacy efforts to secure support for clients.

What might come up which shifts your priorities for the day?

Emergencies for our clients, such as accidents, sudden health issues, or safeguarding risks – I've known instances where we worry

I used to support a pregnant client. Recently, I had a reunion with her and met her baby. It was incredibly moving



©Amy Lewis/Unseen

they could be tracked down by their exploiter. Asylum decisions, which take such a long time, can suddenly come out of the blue with a series of tight deadlines. So, for example, we might need to scramble to track down documents which will enable clients to get universal credit and interviews at the Jobcentre. There could also be accommodation needs to consider – we might need to organise a change from Home Office accommodation, to alternative long-term accommodation, such as with a local authority.

What is the most challenging part of your job?

Assisting homeless clients who fall through the cracks in support. Our clients come from diverse backgrounds with varying immigration statuses and entitlements. When they face sudden homelessness, we must navigate conflicting factors to determine their eligibility for accommodation and persuade relevant authorities to provide housing.

The urgency adds significant time pressure, and stretched accommodation services often require us to make a strong case for our clients to receive any accommodation at all.

Have there been any moments in your job that stick out to you?

I used to support a pregnant client who later transitioned to a new Caseworker. Recently, I had a reunion with her and met her new baby. It was an incredibly moving experience as it was so apparent how much happier she was.

Since I started at Unseen, I've worked with one survivor who has shown an inspiring amount of motivation and resilience. Despite

a complex trafficking case and a drawn-out investigation, he actively engages in his local community and supports Unseen as a member of the Survivor Consultants group.

Recently, he joined a parliamentary inquiry to drive improvements in the National Referral Mechanism [NRM, the Government system for supporting survivors, see page 2] and performed in a local "Battle of the Bands" event with friends from his church.

What does "person-centred" mean to you?

Person-centred is about personalising support to meet individual needs. It's about ensuring survivors are aware of their entitlements and how to access them, and then tailoring your support in a way that gives them the greatest agency.

For instance, a client arriving in the UK received assistance in registering with Borderlands, a local charity aiding asylum seekers. I accompanied him due to shyness, while another client was simply given directions. Both achieved the same outcome of independently attending social groups, tailored accordingly.

What makes you happy during your day?

It's got to be the team – simply a lovely bunch of the best people, who always take the time to check in and help out when someone's got a lot on. Working on a problem with someone else and seeing it through make some of the most enjoyable moments in work.

Find out more about how we work with survivors on our website: unseenuk.org/working-with-survivors



"I want to ensure that Unseen can continue to support women and men who have experienced the very worst of humanity. I have left a gift in my will so that survivors can reclaim their stolen lives, and their voices can be heard"

Ani, Unseen supporter

leave a legacy

When you leave a legacy to Unseen in your Will, you're ensuring the fight against modern slavery continues. We've partnered with Guardian Angel to offer you a free Will-writing service. Guardian Angel has created a simple, step-by-step online process, and every Will is checked by a legal expert.

To claim your free Will online, worth £90, simply scan the QR code or go to bit.ly/unseenlegacy23 and click on the link to Guardian Angel.



Alternatively, if you'd like to talk it through, please email the Fundraising Team and we will get back to you: fundraising@unseenuk.org.



unseenuk.org

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Registered office: 7 Hide Market, West Street, St Philips, Bristol BS2 0BH.