

# Poiema Foundation continues anti-trafficking fight

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[Poiema Foundation](#), a Dallas-area organization focused on human trafficking prevention and survivor care, has been working to educate the public on human trafficking, engage communities and empower survivors through the work of their safe house since 2012.

Natalie Alonzo, education and outreach director at Poiema Foundation, said she first got to know the organization when she volunteered with its community outreach in high school.

She volunteered through her church, [LakePointe Church](#) in Rockwall, which is where [Poiema began in 2012](#). Alonzo said before she volunteered, she didn't really know much about human trafficking.

But participating in outreach allowed her to see "right in [her] own community" what human trafficking looks like, even at hotels she drove past every day. The knowledge she gained grew into a passion.

After college, Alonzo worked directly with child victims of sex trafficking, until things came full circle, and she got the opportunity to join the staff of the Poiema Foundation.

## Work with 4theOne



A group gathers to pray at last year's Trauma to Triumph gala for Poiema Foundation. (Photo / Ryan Hilton)

The foundation partners with [4theOne](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the location and recovery of missing and exploited teens. Volunteers from about 20 church campuses throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area and one in South Carolina, go out on Saturdays to hand out missing persons posters, hoping to find teens before traffickers do.

The volunteers make note of suspicious people and report any other concerns they observe to private investigators who volunteer with 4theOne, when they canvas an area, Alonzo explained. Statistics show the risk of missing teens being trafficked is high, she said, with most likely to be approached by a trafficker within 72 hours of hitting the streets.

Tipline calls from the flyers go directly to private investigators, so Poiema has no way of knowing for sure if a poster they handed out directly leads to

a recovery, she said. But they do know the recovery rate from this partnership is high—492 minors have been recovered by 4theOne since the partnership began.

More than half of the recovered teens, 272 of them, were identified as having been victims of sex trafficking or some sort of sexual exploitation. Alonzo noted those numbers prove the statistics that missing and runaway kids are at risk from sexual predators.

Alonzo recalled one volunteer experience in which a young girl featured on the poster had been a frequent missing person due to her difficult homelife.

The lead private investigator on her case thought they should take a day and “scour the community” for this young girl.

So, he gathered up a troop of volunteers to flood the area and try to find her after praying.

“Prayer is very important to us,” Alonzo noted.

Within 10 minutes of beginning the search, a volunteer spotted the missing girl.

“They were able to get her. And the private investigator knew her from working her case,” so she was compliant with being recovered.

“It’s amazing to see the power of the Lord,” in the work that they do, Alonzo said.

The staff gently and lovingly speak about faith and invite survivors to know the Lord, Alonzo explained. “And it’s been amazing to see. A lot of the [safe house] residents have come to faith in Jesus because of that, ... and it’s just beautiful.”

## Community trainings

National Human Trafficking Prevention Month has been observed [every January since 2010](#), when President Obama first established the emphasis by presidential proclamation.

While estimates on the number of people globally impacted by human trafficking vary, U.S. Customs and Border Protection reports “an estimated 40.3 million people are in modern slavery, including 24.9 million in forced labor and 15.4 million in forced marriage.”

Those numbers break down to 5.4 victims of modern slavery for every 1,000 people in the world, with 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery under the age of 18, the [U.S. Customs and Border Protection website](#) states.

Poiema frequently offers human trafficking awareness training by Zoom. These trainings for the general public are free of charge but [require registration](#).

A few years ago, Alonzo explained, the State of Texas began requiring all healthcare providers to be trained in human trafficking awareness, because there is a high likelihood of victims seeing a healthcare provider during the time they are being trafficked.

So, the organization began to offer a specialized training for health care professionals. These classes, which comply with state stipulations, have a small fee.

Alonzo noted Poiema is passionate about providing medical professionals with human trafficking awareness training. By the end of 2024, the foundation had provided training to more than 4,550 healthcare professionals.

## Aftercare for survivors



Volunteers and staff pray at the 2024 Trauma to Triumph gala for the Poiema Foundation. (Photo / Ryan Hilton)

In addition to its community-focused initiatives, the foundation maintains a safe house where women who have escaped human trafficking can receive the care they need to reclaim agency over their lives and heal.

The length of time each woman resides at the house depends on her individual needs and can last from a few months to a few years. Since the safe house opened, it has provided 33 women who have escaped human trafficking with residential support.

Volunteers who support the work of the safe house are extensively trained, including in the realities of aftercare for survivors of human trafficking.

The overview of that training, Alonzo noted, is, “the realities of the aftercare of a survivor are much more complex and strenuous than most people realize.”

Alonzo said she highlights in her trainings that movies and media often

portray the healing of an individual who has been trafficked as: “Hey, I’m going to come in. I’m going to rescue you. I’m going to take you back home and kind of wipe my hands of it.

“[Because] Great! You’re safe. You’re stable. You’re back home. You can start over.”

Sadly, however, that is “not at all what the healing journey looks like, because of all the trauma that the men, women and children have accrued during the time that they’re being sold,” Alonzo explained.

She said the terrible abuses against these individuals require extensive counseling, and impacted individuals need help “in learning how to rewire their brain.”

Being home is not the conclusion of the injustices of their exploitation, instead “it’s just the beginning of healing,” Alonzo explained.

At the safe house, the foundation helps survivors learn how to live on their own again. They help with things like goal setting, which might seem easy, she confessed.

“But it’s something where—they haven’t had a voice in their own life. Their pimp has taken control of everything.”

So, goal setting helps survivors remember they have the decision, that “this is your life. What do you want it to look like?”

Counseling is essential, but there are many types of therapy, Alonzo noted. In addition to talk therapy, women at the safe house may utilize art therapy or equine therapy, which has been proven to be very beneficial to trauma victims.

Not every story is a happy story. Survivors often are pulled back into trafficking, when they leave a care setting, but Poimea Foundation is

careful to make sure the women they serve know support for them always is available.

Additionally, several women who have come out of Poiema's safe house have gone on to start their own anti-human trafficking organizations or have moved into advocacy roles through speaking publicly about their experience in human trafficking.