

Heartwings Verein

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE - NEWSLETTER 1/2023



Raus aus der Höhle, Le ?

"I want to get out. I don't want to be a slave anymore. I'm being raped all the time! Please help me".
In just the last few days we have received 25 similar messages.

Where injustice and oppression dictate everyday life, change is needed. It needs someone to stand in that rift. It takes someone - you, us, and me. Real change needs everybody because it is only together that we can make a difference. Together we stand in the gap as a society, business, organization, partner, as a church, friends, and family. Change comes when everyone invests their life, time, and shares their money with those who have nothing. This is how the world is healed by giving and love. The key to change is in the hands of each one of us, because change always begins with ourselves.

Dorothee Widmer, Heartwings' main director and co-founder, celebrates her sixtieth birthday this year. For the last 15 years, she has given her all for Heartwings. She says, "I will continue to give EVERYTHING, experience NEW things and bring about GREAT change."

Hole or even hell? The description is irrelevant. What matters is the response, YES and OUT. Victims of forced prostitution long for light. But can they still fly with broken wings? They don't even dare to use their real name anymore. Their clients do not bring freedom, but abuse. With their money the clients degrade the women to objects of their perverted desires. Robbed, traumatized, and dull eyed, the victims of forced prostitution remain stuck in the system - more dead than alive. Because the red-light show must go on. Driven by horrendous rents and the many profiteers of the sex trade.

Many people see the need in places like Zurich's Langstrasse neighborhood. Yet they discreetly turn away. Who will not look away and help? What is real help? Empty promises or gifts out of pity do not bring change.

What is needed are "hostels of charity": places that provide immediate help, long-term psychosocial accompaniment, in combination with professional reorientation. For many helpers, "help" stops here, because the cost of such help is too high.



At Heartwings, we currently support 15 former prostitutes. Seven of them are permanently employed. The exit program "Employment for Freedom" is not a self-supporting business, but an integration program. A single internee costs us CHF 60-70,000 per year. At the end of 2022 our balance sheet revealed that we had helped one exploited woman too many.

But which woman was the one too many?

She who was sold into prostitution by her husband and is now drowning in debt?

She who is unintentionally pregnant?

She who had a heart attack and is terminally ill?

She who is a grandmother and is regularly beaten up by her partner?

Who would you sack first? Which woman should be laid off? For whom is there not enough?

We didn't send any of the seven women back onto the street. For the other 25 women, right now there is no solution. This breaks our hearts.



Every woman who comes forward and wants to drop out is listed on a wall in our office. Even if we can't help yet – no one is forgotten.

Lara* worked in prostitution for 15 years, five of them on the Langstrasse, Zurich. She started working as a minor because of her boyfriend. Lara is a mother of two and has been in our exit program "Employment for Freedom" for almost a year. She has now separated from her pimp boyfriend. Her reason: "I am worth more". We celebrated with her! Last Christmas she went to visit her children in Romania. In January, she did not return. We called her repeatedly. But everyday Lara had a new excuse as to why she could not travel. I sensed that something was wrong. So, I said "Lara, tell me what's wrong. No matter what, I will always love you. Even if you have killed someone. Tell me what it is. I can't help you otherwise." Then Lara told us that with the help of her B permit, which thanks to her employment at Heartwings she now has, took out a loan of 20000 swiss francs. She spent the money on her two children and the house in Romania. In Switzerland, the debt collection letters were waiting for her. Two days later, furious, Lara trudged up the stairs to our office. I took her in my arms, said, "It's good to have you back." She cried. She hadn't expected that. We went to the debt collection office together. She was trembling with fear. Now part of her wage is being impounded. I have to put up with the fact that she is angry because she can't afford to buy something special for lunch during her lunchbreaks and that she won't be going to Romania again this year because she has already used up all of her allocated vacation days. But she also knows that our love for her has not changed. We journey together and we are all allowed to make mistakes. We often experience that it is through mistakes and knock backs that the hearts are healed little more.

This has an impact: Recently, Lara told us that her teenage daughter was wetting the bed, often having nightmares, and gaining a lot of weight. She didn't know what was going on. Her daughter wouldn't talk about it. That's when she said to her, "Tell me what's wrong. No matter what it is, I will always love you." And that is not normal in a country where shame and honor reigns. Lara has learned that even when she loses face, grace catches her. Love covers mistakes and shame, and dishonor evaporates. Lara's daughter told her that she was chatting with someone and had been sexually harassed by him. Lara was able to intervene, file a complaint with the police, and her daughter is now being cared for by a psychologist.



Lea* also works for our cleaning company. Her life changed for the better last year. She began to like herself again and entered a relationship with a man. She was in love and felt safe.

One morning she came to our office accompanied by the police. The police wanted to question her, and the police officer suggested that someone from Heartwings could go with her as a confidant. I dropped everything and accompanied Lea. She told me that her boyfriend had choked her to point of passing urine - this happens a few seconds before death. She spent the night in hospital and now had to be remanded in custody because her boyfriend had made a counteraccusation. In the interrogation protocol it stated that she is a prostitute, although she has been working as a cleaner for more than a year. With that, her case was stigmatized. We went to the Women's Center Zurich to challenge this, and they put us in touch with a top lawyer.



After the pre-trial detention, Lea was banned contact with her boyfriend by the police. This meant that she was liable to prosecution if she met with her boyfriend. We then went to the lawyer, and everything seemed to be going well. Until I found out that Lea and her boyfriend were seeing each other regularly. I confronted her. She said that she and her boyfriend had agreed not to tell on each other. I was so disappointed. We had given her our all: Our time, our contacts, our reputation, and she betrayed us. We had a long talk about the situation, we both cried. The core of the problem was Lea's heart. Lea was abused as a teenager; she was married off to the man and he further violated her dignity daily - her heart was broken. This paved the way to prostitution. Then came along this boyfriend who gave her a little love, but also almost killed her. Lea simply clung to that little bit of love. At any cost. Because she still believed the voice inside her that whispered, "You are stupid and worth nothing." I told Lea how infinitely sorry I was for her, and how from the bottom of my heart I hoped she would find a loving relationship. However not because she is dependent on that man's love, but because their love for one another is genuine. Overflowing, unconditional love. For that, however, a person must be healthy. Not even the best partner in the world can make us healthy. Everyone needs to become healthy for themselves.

And so, every day experience teaches us that the exit process is above all about one thing: the heart. That is why it is not enough to just give these women an apartment and a job. For a self-determined life outside of prostitution to succeed, the heart must be healed. This is an arduous path. Also, for us. So often experience how the women push us away and are extra prickly. As if they consciously want to provoke us to the point at which we push them away. And thus, confirm what they think about themselves - "I'm not worth loving". For this reason: we consciously go the extra mile - with every woman. It is a process that is continuously repeated: "I give everything for you, you screw me, and tomorrow I choose to give everything for you all over again. Because I love you and I know that this is the only way to heal your heart."

We see time and again that the stamp of prostitution sticks to women. During an ultrasound examination, **Anna***, who was pregnant, enthusiastically told the doctor about her new life. When the doctor found out that Anna had been working in prostitution, the psychosocial board and the KESB were called in without consulting her. Although Anna has been living a new life for three years.

Our society titles sex work as a "normal profession". Why then does the same society automatically assume that Anna cannot be a good mother? Decisions are being made behind her back. She is being incapacitated.



Image by Dorothee Widmer: "Growth explosion".

The picture shows a flowerpot, the plant has grown strong. The roots have become so dense that the pot has exploded. It is time to plant this healthy plant out into the open.

What a fitting image! It's time for more space. Here at Heartwings we are bursting at the seams: Within a short period of time, so many women have contacted us wanting to leave prostitution. Our phone hasn't stopped ringing. Our rooms are exploding. It's getting tighter and tighter. Many potential cleaning customers get put on the waiting list. Simply because we can't afford to pay more wages, housing, education, and emergency costs for new internees. The Heartwings pot is bursting because we are growing at an explosive rate on all fronts. Funds and resources are coming in however they cannot keep up with the pace of growth.

MAKE A NOTE: ON 30.09 & 01.10 THE VERNISSAGE OF DOROTHÉE WIDMER WILL TAKE PLACE IN OUR OFFICE AT LANGSTRASSE 62. YOU ARE ALL CORDIALLY INVITED. FURTHER INFORMATION WILL FOLLOW.

The time has come for Heartwings to be replanted along with all of you donors, friends, helpers, supporters, and prayers, into a pre-prepared, expansive space. How and when that will happen, we don't know. But we do have the necessary faith, hope, and belief. We are taking further bold steps, trusting in a great God who can do the impossible. For our next steps we will need many large donations (maybe through an endowment fund?) but also a house with many rooms, something like a hotel or a former hospital. A big house where all the women can find a safe home. Who will participate? Who will invest? Who can donate a house? Who can help promote work integration? Which psychotherapist will support the women recover from trauma? Which social worker will get involved with us, takes care of administrative procedures, and help integrate the women? Which doctor will provide medical or gynaecological care? Which lawyer will assist us in legal matters? Which debt counsellor will help tackle issues of debt that many of the women leaving prostitution face? Who has a big heart, strong faith, experience, and wisdom to complement our team? We need you!

THANK YOU FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO THESE WOMAN'S LIVES. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS HEARTWINGS MIRACLE IS POSSIBLE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COMPASSION, LOVE, AND FAITHFULNESS. YOU ARE OUR HEROES AND OUR HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR THE WOMEN. THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Account details for donations

Raiffeisen Schweiz Genossenschaft,
CH-9001 St. Gallen / PC Bank 90-602-2
IBAN CH68 8080 8008 7881 2642 1
In favor of: Heartwings Verein - 8004 Zürich

Online donations: www.heartwings.ch

Donations are tax deductible in Switzerland.

TWINT donation

Scan the QR-
Code with your
TWINT-APP
(without thank-
you note.)



Donate online

Scan the
QR-Code &
donate

