

Meeting with Libre Solutions: January 8 2019

Libre Solutions: Gary Spratt (Trustee), Paul Miller (Consultant)  
Caritas Salford: Mark Wiggin (Director), Anthony Brown (Volunteer Coordinator, Anti-Trafficking)

Over the last few years the amount of media attention and work by charities to combat human trafficking has increased enormously. However, a view that is growing is that ending human trafficking will need more than criminal prosecutions which can only ever touch the edges of the problem. What is needed is a change of attitude amongst employers to become responsible in ensuring that their operations and supply chains are free of slavery.

Libre Solutions is a not for profit company driven by the desire to abolish Modern Slavery and end the exploitation of vulnerable human beings. One of its focus points the private sector compliance, offering training and advice to enable businesses to meet an ethical and legal requirement to ensure they do all they can to prevent labour abuse and slavery within their operation and supply chains.

Caritas Diocese of Salford has an aim to rid the Diocese of modern-day slavery by 2025 and in order to do so it needs to expand its remit beyond awareness raising to tackling the issue at source. Libre Solutions offers a vision we have something to learn from.

We met Gary Spratt, a trustee, and Paul Miller, a senior consultant with the company. Both retired from the Police after 30 days of service. Between them they also have substantial experience of trafficking in Immigration, Sham Marriages and County Lines. Their experience with Libre Solutions has led to a particular concern in the construction, agriculture and leisure industries and also cannabis factories and nail bars. Cannabis factories and nail bars are linked in that nail bars can be a way of laundering money from cannabis by South East Asian organised crime groups.

Libre Solutions conducted a nail bar scoping exercise in conjunction with, and sponsored by, the GMP Challenger programme, Clewer and the GLAA. Starting with the internet they located nail bars and found many more as they went around doing external observations. 455 businesses were identified offering nail bar services in Salford and Trafford, two of the ten boroughs in Greater Manchester. 78 of which were dedicated nail bars. 38 of those were risk assessed as having issues of malpractice. Extrapolating from an average of four exploited people per offending premise, modern day slavery in nail bars is clearly an issue in need of further exploration.

Another problem area of unlicensed businesses, is car washes. Licencing of these businesses is impractical so the alternative of kite marking is being pursued. Starting with car washes and the Clewer/GLAA car wash app, Clewer/GLAA have now moved onto nail bars and an app will be launched soon. Libre have put in a bid to the Home Office which if

awarded, would lead to an accreditation system being introduced to the nail bar industry. This bid has been done in partnership with GLAA, Santa Marta & Clewer.

For private sector commitment to tackling slavery, Libre Solutions believe that to get at the industries with the main supply chains it is necessary to harness them via vehicles like the Institute of Directors and the Chamber of Commerce. At the moment only 50% of the 16,000 companies with a turnover of £36m are compliant. To approach 100% compliance the government has set up a working party to address non-compliance and focus the private sector on conforming with the act. The UK government is currently completing its own supply chain audit and will be looking to be Modern Slavery Act compliant in the near future. It is widely expected that the public sector purse will then follow suit and any business in a public sector supply chain will need to be MSA compliant prior to contracts being renewed or started.

Housing associations are another area to pursue. Not all rented accommodation is let legally despite best housing association intentions – the supply chain issue rears its head again. But in addition to good practice amongst housing associations there is also the issue of what housing association personnel see on the same streets as they visit their own properties. It is envisaged that a number of factors will raise the risk to housing associations in the near future that will impact on slavery abuse. Namely, increased demand for more social housing to be built, increased opportunity for exploitation by organised crime and a lack of knowledge and training within the industry on slavery related issues.

Libre Solutions have a long term four stage strategy:

- Raise awareness via training with key businesses.
- Identify the dimensions of different industries to develop specific strategies for them.
- Build in system and processes to manage risk within the business that ensures ongoing protection and ethical business practice.
- Recognise opportunities provided by changes in legislation to implement change.

They believe that their strategy is freely transferrable between industry sectors.

As we contemplate our aspiration to rid Salford Diocese of Modern-Day Slavery by 2025 this discussion with Libre Solutions was extremely useful, highlighting the importance of tackling the issue via business their supply chains in partnership with local community initiatives. It will need to be a key part of our strategy.