



# The WellHouse

**A Safe Refuge of Hope**  
Reporting by Nicole Allshouse





Did you know over the past 12 years, The WellHouse has served over 600 women and children who were trafficked - helping on average 30-33 at any given time?

And according to the CEO, Carolyn Potter, many were also enslaved by drugs which they used to numb the intense pain they were in - before, during and after the trafficking.

“These people are our daughters, and many have been failed by the very systems put into place to help them. They have experienced familial trafficking which means a family member sold them for drugs, pornographic purposes or another commodity. But there is hope; we experience it daily. The mission of The WellHouse is to honor God by rescuing and providing opportunities for restoration to female survivors of human trafficking who have been sexually exploited,” Potter said.

To fully appreciate the story of The WellHouse, you first have to learn how it was born.

Potter says The WellHouse was founded by a survivor of human sex trafficking.

“While she was still struggling with her own healing, she began assisting in ministering to women in horrific circumstances including that of human trafficking. Upon realizing that there needed to be a place where these women could come and be safe as they journeyed toward their healing, the vision for The WellHouse was born. This was 2010, and while human trafficking had begun being recognized as a social injustice needing attention, few around the country and none in our state, were addressing the issue effectively and sufficiently,” Potter said.





*The WellHouse offers survivors a safe place to stay at their St. Clair county campus. Photo by Brian Moats for 1819 News.*

After its founding, The WellHouse was able to obtain a home in Birmingham and many volunteers from local congregations participated in the renovation of the home. Eventually, The WellHouse relocated to St. Clair County and eventually to its beautiful campus in Odenville, still in St. Clair County.

And now people from all over America know The WellHouse.

“We meet people where they are and offer them opportunities to heal in a safe environment where individuality in treatment is honored. From the beginning, The WellHouse has believed that introducing survivors to a true and living God and allowing them the opportunity to embrace a faith that is sustaining is the best thing we can do. At The WellHouse we believe that Christian faith-based programs are effective in their services, and as we partner with other Christian organizations in gathering data, we believe that we will eventually be able to compile data that will prove the effectiveness of faith-based services,” Potter said.

But even without the data, Potter says every fiber of her being witnesses the power of God each day at The WellHouse.

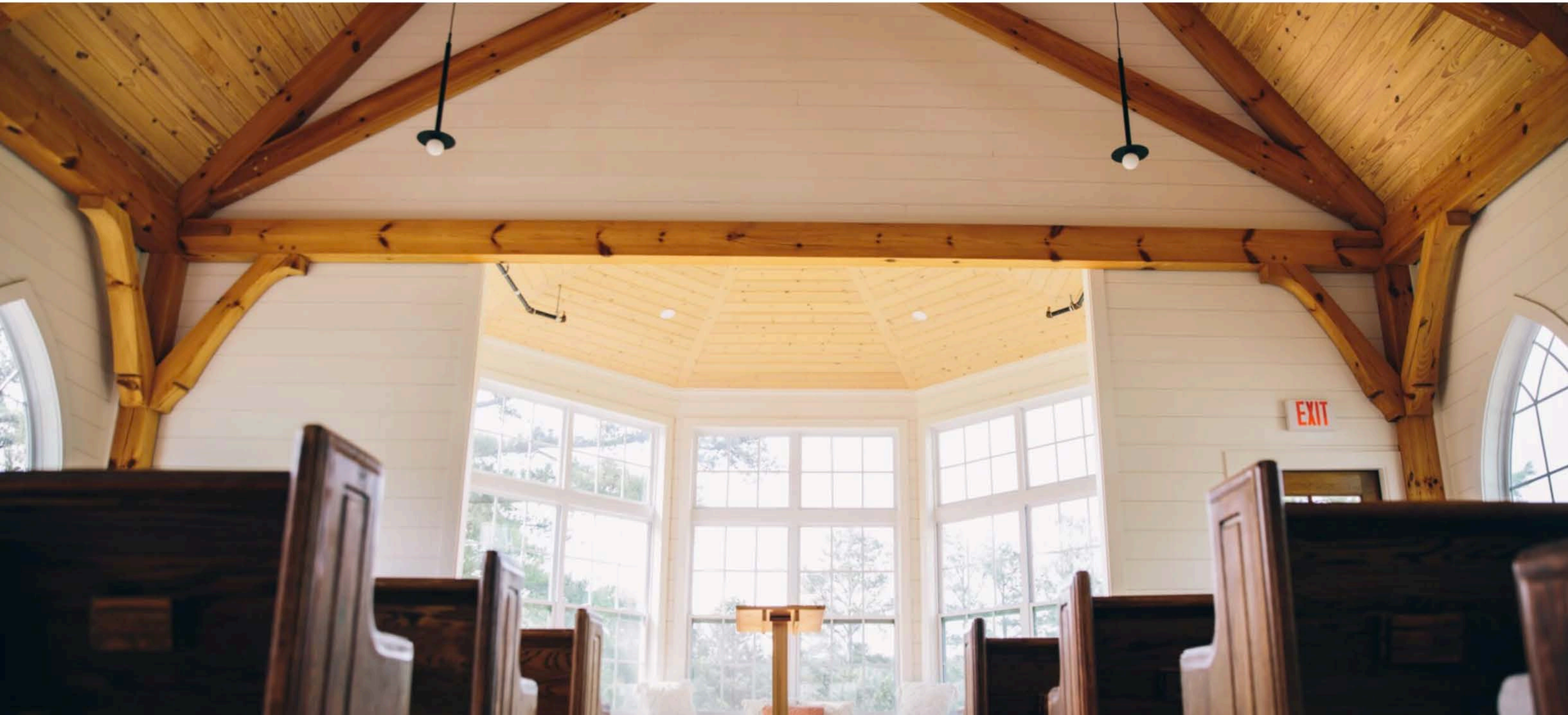
“We live in a very broken world that is only getting worse. Peace that comes from having a true walk with God and resilience born out of knowing that our God will not forsake us even in the most difficult struggle, makes it possible for us to continue to serve. Many people talk about being called to a cause, but, I believe that we are each called to love God and love people, and throughout our lives we are privileged to experience various assignments. Sometimes we are placed in assignments that are seemingly impossible, but, truly, through Christ all things are possible. At The WellHouse, we experience the most heartbreaking struggles along with the greatest of rewards. Viewing situations with an eternal perspective only increases our motivation to continue,” Potter explained.



Of course, even the strongest of believers need to recharge. And this is why it is so important that Potter keeps a close eye on her team and her staff.

“We are constantly reminding one another of the need to care for ourselves as we are daily experiencing 'vicarious trauma' which is the trauma one experiences while carrying for others what they are unable to effectively and emotionally carry for themselves,” Potter outlined.

"It is important to understand your own trauma and seek your own therapeutic solutions. We encourage our staff to take advantage of their PTO and to allow other staff to help carry the load. Further, moving away from the need to be a "hero" in the work and knowing that we are not responsible for the results, provides a measure of peace and resilience that allows us to continue. And, of course, like the survivor residents, embracing faith and standing on the promises of God from His word is essential."





*The WellHouse's on campus chapel. Photo by Brian Moats for 1819 News.*

Of course, when God is present, so is the devil. In 2023, Potter says social media has contributed to much of the evil in our world to include human sex trafficking.

“Certainly, there are studies that show that traffickers utilize social media to lure vulnerable people into their snare. We have known for years that traffickers have advertised their victims for sale on internet sites. So, social media, the internet, and the willingness of a trafficker to utilize any of these means to attract and to sell a victim creates opportunities that would not otherwise be available,” Potter stated.


But the upside of social media Potter said, is how it has brought the plight of survivors to light more than ever. This awareness can help facilitate change for other victims.

“Our numbers have grown, primarily due to our opening the home for youth who have been trafficked,” she advised. “Also, while we have seen a decrease in law enforcement referrals, we have grown our partnerships with other referral sources both in state and nationally. Focus seems to have shifted from sex trafficking to labor trafficking, but, we believe there is a correlation and they are intertwined. Based on the number of victims being advertised on the internet, the crime of human trafficking has not been eradicated by any means.”

But one thing is certain - once a woman or child arrives at The WellHouse, they are safe. Predators stay away.

“The myth that traffickers will come for the survivors has not been true for us,” Potter emphasized. “Our partners around the country have similar experiences. We are told that it is easier to replace a victim than to go after one who has been recovered and no longer in the control of the trafficker.”

And the staff continually reassures the residents that they are safe.



“Our campus projects safety and peace, and many have shared that they literally feel this peace as soon as they come onto our campus. We have taken security measures, and while they may not be obvious to outsiders, they are clear to those of us who are here daily, including our residents.

The WellHouse employs 30 staff and contractors. However, many more people contribute to the well-functioning of The WellHouse to include volunteers and partners who mentor, transport, provide maintenance and lawn care, education, art and equine therapy, sewing classes, Bible studies, financial classes, and opportunities after survivors exit The WellHouse.”

- Carolyn Potter, Chief Executive Officer



For readers who have not heard of The WellHouse, Potter says she wants people to know it is an incredible ministry where amazing transformation happens.

“We have built our programming around 5 main characteristics that most survivors exhibit and these are: childhood abuse, complex PTSD trauma, substance use disorder, lack of life skills, and a lack of education,” she outlined. “By addressing these issues through an individualized person-centered plan, we see people who were without hope when they arrived at The WellHouse move toward becoming the person they were created to be.”



And if you want to help with Potter's mission, she would welcome you.

"People seem surprised when we tell them they can be a part of this work and come visit our campus and experience The WellHouse," she said. "We have processes in place for vetting those who partner with us, and our resident survivors trust us to ensure their safety. Also, I continue to be surprised to hear that some people do not understand the nature of human trafficking and blame the victim. Recently, I explained to an official of the government that there is a law in place, the Safe Harbor Bill, that decriminalizes prostitution for those ages 19 and under. But, the response was still that the youth are willing participants. Those who work with human trafficking victims know that there is no such thing as a child prostitute. I am amazed that there are those who still believe this."

Another way you can get involved is by inviting team members at The WellHouse to speak in your churches and at your civic organizations. In addition, you can go to [www.the-wellhouse.org](http://www.the-wellhouse.org) and learn of many volunteer opportunities. The Wellhouse also depends on the monetary generosity of supporters to sustain the work.

"While our campus is located in a small rural area of Alabama, The WellHouse has become a national thought leader in the area of residential living and the services we offer," she stated. "We have extended the influence of The WellHouse to others around the country who desire to develop a similar work by writing a manual, The WellHouse Way, and offering it, free of charge, to those who desire to learn from our model. In addition, we wrote a book, *She is Safe*, of twelve stories of graduates of The WellHouse in their own words. It is fascinating to read of their journey from an abusive childhood, trafficking, and healing."



WellHouse Bible. Photo by Brian Moats for 1819 News.

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