

ADAPT. Theatre Company

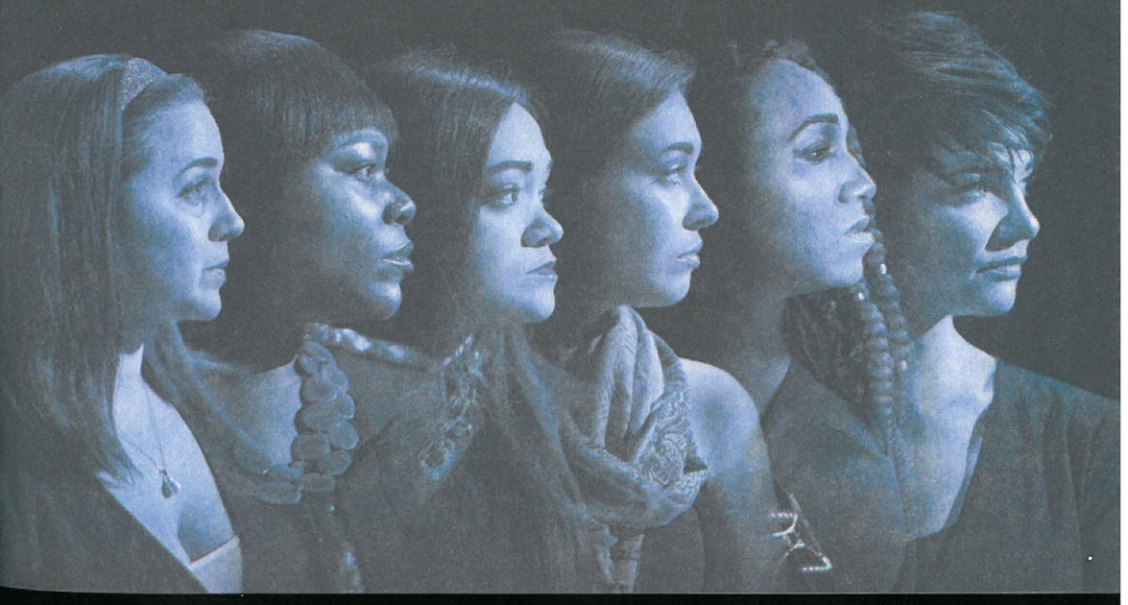


# STORIES

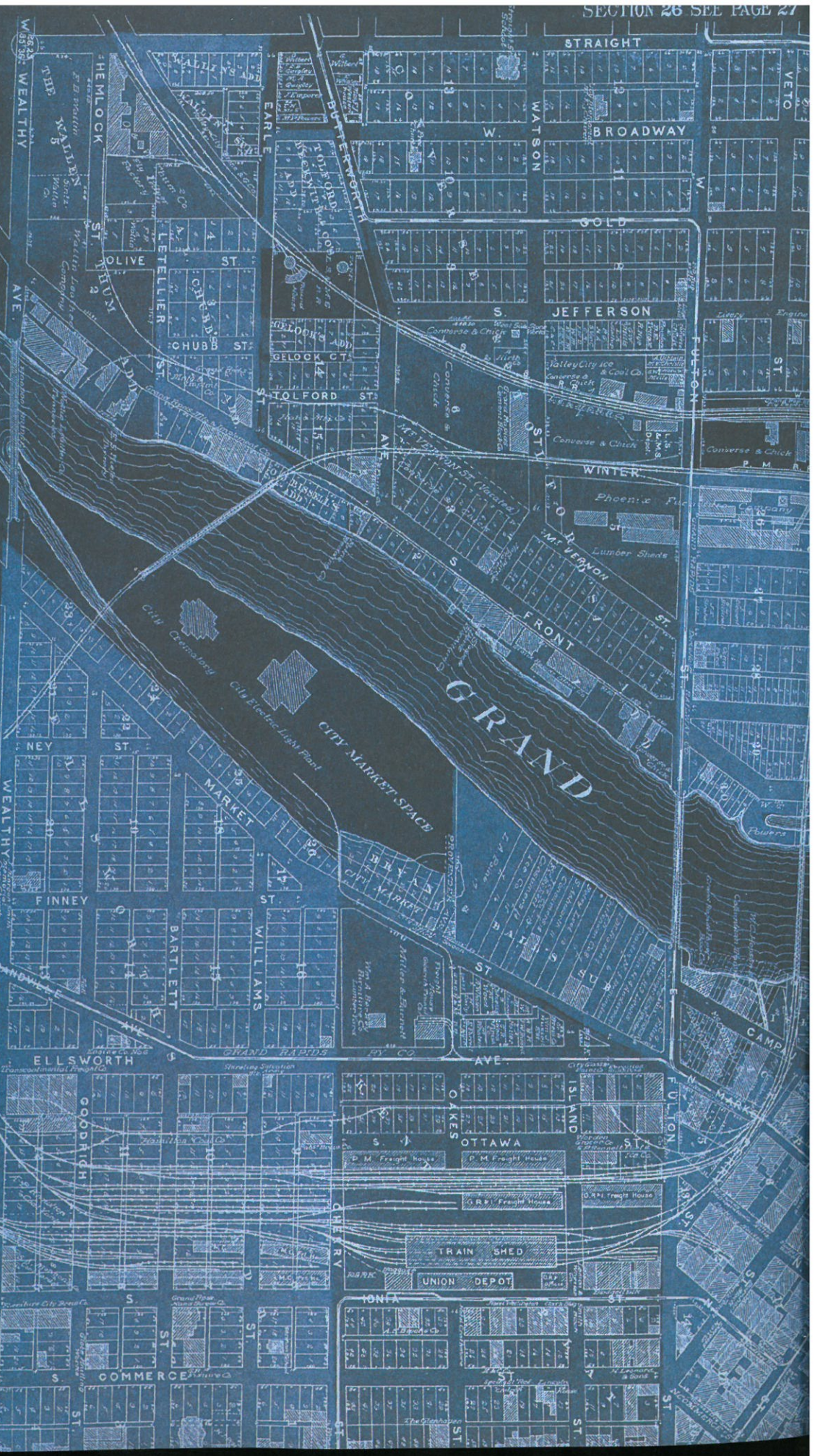
a pilgrimage to heal  
human trafficking

# IN

# BLUE







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# director's note

There are more persons enslaved on the planet today than ever before in history. My brain reels with questions: How can this be? Why are we so riddled by this blight on humanity? Is there any way to end it? How is it possible that my home state is failing at combatting this?

It feels overwhelming.

How do I face this as an artist?

I act, and I act not out of selfish ambition or blind conceit, but from a deep empathy for the human condition. The actions I take are to promote real lasting change. When I became involved with *Stories in Blue* for the first time, I didn't have any idea at all what it would become or how we might work to create art out of the stories of enslaved people. The first time I interviewed a survivor of sex trafficking, it just blew me away into a sea of despair. More questions:

What could I do to help her?

How can we end this pain?

My friend James Kofi Annan who combats child slavery in Ghana talked to me about this and he said "My friend, we cannot end the pain, we can only fight and use our gifts to promote change. We can stop it. We can stop it." He gave me the courage to tread on.

After that, I interviewed a few dozen survivors of human trafficking from Michigan and decided to focus in on sex trafficking because this is where the need is right now in our midst. The survivors bravely shared their stories and allowed us to portray them. We found a way to work through the material, to hone it and craft it into art. And now the questions we find ourselves with are:

How can we use this art to carry the message of ending trafficking into the world?

And that's where we are and we will continue. We will use our gifts to educate, to empower, to change, and to heal.

# dramaturg's note

I don't always know what art means anymore. If it has a use. There are days that I spend all afternoon staring at a blank screen, thinking about nothing while the rest of the world burns. And I wonder if this, if anything I do, has a point.

This is not a question that I, or any other artist for that matter, can answer. We are stuck at the apex of western society, painfully aware that, individually at least, we can do very little.

**All we do is tell stories.**

But every story is a capsule of the person's life who tells it: break it open and you will find their fragments. It's in these stories that we find the possibility of arriving somewhere that is not ourselves. By this connection, we bring ourselves closer to the position of those who speak, and bring them closer to us in turn.

When you listen to another person's story, you can dive as deeply as you can, and somehow come face to face with yourself. Past all the difficulty, extra work and interpersonal strife that has sometimes clogged the process, this has kept me working on *Stories in Blue*. I have traveled in them. I have shaken my own hand, found myself somehow in the story of a human trafficking victim, and that has changed me.

This is the original impulse, I think, for the piece, and why the metaphor of pilgrimage has worked so well in crafting our somewhat unconventional performance. This journey, this metaphor for life, is one that we are all on. This performance is merely to show others on their journey, one that is often invisible and less discussed.

The more we know about people and what they create, I believe, the more we understand the world, and how our society functions. We need stories to learn and grow, to harness our habits and addictions, to use them to move one step at a time toward our journey's end. Along the way, there are different opportunities to stop and rest, different campfires that spring up when the night gets dark and we almost inherently look for companionship. Each campsite is a different story, a different encounter.

**Stories in Blue is also one of them.**

It's far off, and a bit difficult to get to. It's also not very well kept. The people here are rough, and what they have to say will not give you comfort.

**But their words are worth hearing.**

I'd like to thank you for coming. Please, sit down. Rest your bones for a while...







# ArtPrize

Performing the gritty true stories of modern-day slavery to bring healing through the beauty of pilgrimage during ArtPrize 2016

Part groundbreaking art piece, part social justice campaign, *Stories in Blue: A Pilgrimage to Heal Human Trafficking* is an unprecedented art piece exploring the experience and impact of human trafficking in West Michigan. ADAPT. Theatre Company presents a pilgrimage of song, movement, and poetic performance of the real words of trafficking survivors from West Michigan. Running as a time-based entry in ArtPrize 8, *Stories in Blue* will be performed daily through downtown Grand Rapids from September 21st to October 2nd, 2016.

This project is a response to the high rate of human trafficking in Michigan; one of the highest in the nation. During ArtPrize itself, the incidence of human trafficking in Grand Rapids leaps. Director Dr. Stephanie Sandberg, and the ensemble at ADAPT. Theatre Company, address this by bringing compelling true stories to the streets of the city, mirroring the process of individual healing through the repeated sharing of traumatic experience.

Journeying together, six actors will perform in significant locations in the downtown area, including Rosa Parks Circle and Calder Plaza. The pilgrimage ends every day at a textured art installation that includes intimate filmed stories and striking visual imagery.

## Acknowledgements

This project is supported generously by grants from the Calvin Center For Christian Scholarship, The Fred Keller Center for Systemic Change, and from the Frey Foundations ArtPrize Seed Grant Program with additional support from the Speak EZ Lounge.

Special thanks in memoriam to Linn Maxwell-Keller who generously supported social justice through the arts and the following: Shawn Paul Evans and the Department of Theater, Dance, and Film Studies at Washington and Lee University; Brandon Bucy, Jennifer Roberts, Cailin Skidmore, Andrew Norden and Brad Klaver as well as Crossroads Bible Church; Women at Risk International, Shelly Urbane and Spectrum Theatre, Ben Kleyn, Joya Hamstra, Catherine Van Til, Connie Versluys, Bridget Woudwyk, Nora Faber, Heather Bryant, Sidney Versluys, and Aynsley Douglas.



# cast & crew

Stephanie Sandberg - Project Conception/Direction/Film Editing

Dan Christmann - Dramaturgy/Assistant Direction

Erica Monroe - Costume Design/Textiles

David Zeyl - Technical Direction

Brent DeGraaf - Film Editing

Theo Ndawillie II - Music Composition

Darius "T.Q." Colquitt - Acting/Communication/Social Media

Rena Dam - Acting/Project Co-ordination

Emily Wetzel - Acting/Dramaturgy

Molly Jones - Acting

Julianne Howe-Bouwens - Acting

Katie Tamayo - Acting

Glendon-Tyler Ashmon - Stage/Event Co-ordination

Ryan Spencer Reed - Visual/ArtPrize Consultant/Marketing

Jeanne Meyers - Managing Director: ADAPT. Theatre Company





# blue

There are many reasons to choose the color blue. Blue is the color of the United Nation's campaign to end human trafficking. A light blue heart, worn at the lapel or as a bumper sticker, is meant to spread awareness of modern day slavery. By infusing our entire design with blue, we are aligning ourselves with this awareness effort. The different shades of blue symbolize the great diversity of trafficking stories. **There is no single narrative for human trafficking.** There are those who are more vulnerable to being trafficked, but it could happen to anyone. The blue shades help to remind us and our audience that trafficking is everywhere.

"These things happen...the soul's bliss  
And suffering are bound together  
Like the grasses..."

-Jane Kenyon



# mapping

History is linked to the most specific places. Whether we realize it or not, the events of the past lie beneath our feet like the layers of river mud. We often forget that this is the case. We live in the present. The present is all that exists.

From the costumes, which allude to different historical styles, to the antique cyanotype printing in our images, *Stories in Blue* hints at a history that exists in the present. This is why our pilgrimage itself travels to different points of historical sex trafficking or prostitution in Grand Rapids; it is alluding both to the present nature of trafficking and its historical patterns.

These patterns have altered, but they have not changed. Sex trafficking, prostitution, and slavery are, in many cases, just different words for the same thing. "There is a difference between prostitution as a choice and prostitution as a lack of choice." Both traffickers and slave traders rely on the exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Both employ techniques that displace and alienate their victims who are therefore forced to rely on their captors to survive. The idea is to make the captive as meek and docile as possible, so that time and place no longer have any meaning. Time becomes a circular routine, into which nothing new can enter.

We walk our pilgrimage day after day to symbolize this circle, which has been a part of the human experience for a thousand years. It is a gesture of resignation, but also of hope, that one day too this circle will be broken.

"Time, which brings  
Either love or money to men, hands on to me  
Only this withered rose, this empty tracery  
Of streets with names recurring from the past  
In my blood."

-G.L. Borges



In the year 2000, Charlie Donaldson and Randy Flood, both professional psychologists, established a new kind of psychological practice in West Michigan. Based in the now thoroughly established field of gender studies and their own psychological practices with prison inmates, their therapeutic practice aimed at dealing with and healing the psychological consequences of exploited power. This theoretical scenario was not entirely unusual. Therapists had been dealing with the traumatic experiences of women and minorities since Freud's day. But the area of their focus was highly unusual. Instead of working to heal those who are abused, mentally, physically, or socially, Flood and Donaldson set their aim on those who, the majority of the time, are abusers: men.

The Men's Resource Center, as it became known, started with two relatively simple ideas, one a simple fact, and the other a sound conviction.

The first: over 90% of the prison population is male. In our society in particular, men are much more likely to "act out", break the law, or act violently in times of stress. It is more than likely that, in a case of abuse or exploitation, a man was behind the violent acts.

The second: Those who act criminally are not in need of punishment but of healing, and are more often suffering from abuse themselves.

These two elements have mixed together for the past sixteen years to create a unique form of counseling that deals with specific socialization issues that affect men; the trauma of emotional repression; aggression problems; hypermasculinity; all stemming from, for lack of a better word, privilege. In their book *Masculinity: Understanding and Healing the Malaise of American Manhood*, Donaldson and Flood theorize that in



# addiction

many men, childhood trauma, self-doubt, shame, and fear of the world combine. The result is often a person who reacts violently in threatening situations, who coerces others for their own self gain, and refuses to empathize, because if they show “weakness” then the world will destroy them. The privilege of the male position is that it allows them to remain this way - fighting for a narcissistic realization of success, or “manliness,” by any means.

Of course, this cannot be an accurate portrayal of all men. But understanding what extreme masculine socialization does to the male psyche, especially as it has been shaped by American society, could go a long way toward understanding the persistence of sex trafficking. **Traffickers and johns, contrary to the ideology that would paint them as irredeemable monsters, also are the product of causal forces, and grow up in environments that lead them to make specific life decisions. Exploitation and violence are often normalized, especially in unfavorable situations, growing up in poverty or with little education.** Understanding these factors, and attempting to heal violent men from the tremors of early male socialization, could go a long way in both healing the malaise of human trafficking and preventing demand in the next generation.

In contemporary media, those who buy and traffic in sex are either portrayed as exceptionally charismatic, sex addicts (whose lives are also often quite glamorous), or villains without humanity. **The insight that the Men’s Resource Center gives, and the reason their therapy may be so effective, is that it allows us to understand the addiction.** What causes traffickers to do what they do does not exclude them from guilt. It does allow a new perspective, and a new way forward within this important issue that affects us all.

For more information, visit:

[www.menscenter.org](http://www.menscenter.org)

[www.mascupathy.org](http://www.mascupathy.org)



# nordic

There is a difference between prostitution as a choice and prostitution as a lack of choice. According to Swedish law, prostitution is not a personal preference; it is an abomination. In Sweden, prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes are seen as issues that cannot, and should not, be separated. It is understood that the purpose of the recruitment, transport, sale, or purchase of women and girls by traffickers, pimps, and members of organized crime groups within countries or across national borders is, in the overwhelming majority of cases, to sell these female human beings into the prostitution industry.

Since the Nordic Model was passed in 1998 Sweden's National Criminal Investigation Department has reported that traffickers, pimps, and johns no longer consider Sweden as a marketable location for sexual services. Because of the consequences that face them, these individuals and groups are deterred from their attempts to recruit and market women and girls within the borders of Swedish territory. If law enforcement and the court systems make it a priority to prosecute justly for buying sex, johns are much less likely to risk their reputations, their personal freedom, and the stigma attached to consumerism by buying the services provided by trafficked individuals. When demand for a service decreases, those meeting the demand must readjust to adequately act as a supplier without losing money. As unfeeling and clinical as this language is in such a humanity-based set of issues, it is important to consider sex trafficking from the perspective of the trafficker. If s/he is not profiting from these activities, s/he will not pursue them as an economic prospect. The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation conducted interviews with men who have purchased sex, who reported that increased jail time and public exposure would indeed deter them from soliciting prostitutes.



# model

While the Nordic Model has great success in Sweden, the question is raised about its feasibility in the United States. An example of effective steps that have been taken to combat sex trafficking in the Chicago area have been the programs and initiatives set into place by Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart. Sheriff Dart's office organizes the 'National Johns Suppression Initiative', which encouraging a permanent change in police practices. Dart and his team place heavy fines on johns who are caught purchasing sex and employ a Human Trafficking Response Team to work with the woman present during the john's arrest. Counseling and job training are also offered to women who do happen to be arrested for solicitation. **As of yet, Michigan needs more of these procedures and must educate its residents about the issues surrounding the sex trade and human trafficking.** What Dart is doing in Chicago, however, is still a fairly new practice in a new program; there is work to be done in figuring out a way to pursue justice, prosecute criminals, and protect victims.

There is no "right" answer for addressing sex trafficking. Cultural and social biases and prejudices often deter people from taking specified action in targeting violations of human rights. The Nordic Model is not the best option that is available; and it is certainly not the only option. It is, however, what has proved to be the most productive and pragmatic solution.

**Until there is a better way, this model serves as a standard for how sex trafficking must be examined and litigated.**



# legislation

According to the United Nations, human trafficking is defined as

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

Sex trafficking, by turn, is the exploitation of those who are trafficked into commercial sex acts, when these acts are induced by force, fraud, or coercion. Interestingly enough, the avenues and methods that traffickers exploit to coerce others into the sex trade are often similar to those used in labor trafficking. All forms of trafficking involve the exploitation of vulnerable people. All involve the commercialization and demand of a “product” produced at the expense of human lives.

The League of Nations International Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children was a landmark ruling on human trafficking. This marked the first time an international organization recognized that although slavery had been outlawed in many countries, traffickers had not stopped. The traffickers just went underground.

As of 2014, the Polaris project reported that all fifty states had passed some form of legislation beyond the national minimum. However, twelve states, including Michigan, had “failed to make minimal efforts to pass laws that support victims.” In that year, Michigan was rated as the second worst state for human trafficking, rated by number of cases reported. Since that time, significant legislation has been passed in the Michigan senate. In 2014, Senator Judy Emmons introduced a bill to the Michigan senate; all twenty one laws quickly passed through both sections of the legislature.

Since that time, Michigan has fallen to the sixth worst state for human trafficking, but the work is still far from over. There is still much to be done to prevent this societal malaise.



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PART OF  
**THE CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS AND ENVIRONS**  
SECTION 25

Scale 900 ft. to 1 inch

T. 7 N., R. 12 W. of the Michigan Meridian

COMPILED BY  
T. O. WILLIAMS, KENT CO. SURV.  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.



SECTION 24 SEE PAGE 21



# Stories in Blue

Your Vote is Our Voice

ArtPrize® 2016

ARTIST

VOTE: #63351

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