

# Heartwings NGO

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE - NEWSLETTER 3/2022



## THE RIFT

The forced prostitute from Nigeria cried and cried. "Shut up and work you cry-baby!" said one of her housemates. But the woman continued to cry. Inconsolable and sick, she sat on the doorstep of a run-down house on Zurich's Langstrasse, where more than 40 women from West Africa are forced to prostitute themselves in small, overpriced rooms. "Yesterday I was taken from Italy to cold Switzerland. I want to go back home to my children!"

Such crisis interventions are challenging: surveillance cameras, clients, and an "overseer lover boy" from Nigeria. Someone recognized that we were from Heartwings. Then everyone went away and we were able to have a deep and open conversation. We sat on the doorstep in the cold and experienced a radiating sense of peace. "We'll be back!" we promised, and she hugged us tightly goodbye.

At the second meeting, we found her in the locked-up, multi-story house. She beamed and danced like a child as we handed her a gift bag of useful hygiene items. Then it got quiet and emotional: she told us how she was an abused woman from Nigeria, smuggled through Libya by gangs of traffickers

and then barely survived the boat crossing to Italy. "Tomorrow I have to leave Switzerland, but unfortunately it's not back to my children, but to Italy!" Human trafficking is ugly and shows the tension society, politics and authorities are in. Young girls from poverty stricken countries are forced to prostitute themselves without even understanding German. Inner courtyards with Ukrainian cars, traumatized refugee women have to work in run down houses - even children live there. If we report to the police, we get this feeble reply: "Unfortunately, our hands are tied as long as the women don't have the courage to file a report against the perpetrators..." How can a traumatized, abused and threatened victim testify to the police?

It is therefore not surprising that in 2021 there were only 13 convictions for human trafficking in Switzerland, with lenient sentences. In addition, recently the shocking news: The long-time Zurich chief prosecutor of the department for violent and sexual offenses has changed sides. He is now a milieu lawyer!

Thoughts about the picture:

A person was sought to step into the gaping chasm in society, where good falls by the wayside and evil is covered over with white paint. But no one was found. God came into a cold, deceitful, unjust and wicked world. He saw the slavery, exploitation and oppression. We at Heartwings want to continue to stand in the gap. This also happens through the help of donors.



# CHANGE

When women leave prostitution and make their way to a life of freedom, they experience a constant tension between gratitude and being completely overwhelmed. The new life situation pushes former prostitutes to their limits. The unfamiliar freedom and the language and cultural barriers cause fear and insecurity. They react to this with provocation and rejection. In this turmoil, there need be people who understand their frustration and ingratitude, yet still love them and remain gracious. Four people who stand in this rift tell of their experiences with these women.

I am a restaurant owner and found out about Heartwings a few weeks ago, my heart was touched by their work. Without further ado, I reached out to Heartwings and offered a former prostitute a job at my restaurant. After Céline\*'s first trial day, I quickly realized that the stress of the hospitality industry was overwhelming to Céline, who has been traumatized by prostitution. Nevertheless, I wanted to give her a chance. I hired her full-time, although we actually have enough employees. Also, it was important to me from the outset to give her a wage that is customary in the industry, so that she feels valued and does not feel at any disadvantage because of her past. The days with Céline always put me in challenging situations. Of course, my employees ask questions; why have I hired her, she obviously doesn't have the necessary qualifications? Despite the hurdles, I am really impressed with Céline. Every day she comes to work on time and motivated, regardless of her past and her day-to-day struggles in the exit process. I choose to show favor to her every day and create individual solutions for her.



"The pain is killing me I have to go to the dentist today! I can't wait another day. Otherwise I'll go to Romania tonight and have my teeth done there," says Leyla\*. Timidly, I call the dentist, who offers us his help free of charge. Miraculously, he has time and wants to help. Thank God! He gives us an appointment for that evening. So I cancel my private plans and drive to the dentist with Leyla after work. He looks at everything carefully and works on her teeth for two hours. He and his team also sacrifice their evening off for Leyla. After the operation, Leyla is beside herself. Not because she is relieved or grateful. She is annoyed. Why did the dentist take so long? In this time she would have received a new set of teeth in Romania - I have to listen to this and much more on the way back. Right now, she doesn't understand that in Romania her teeth would have only been patched up provisionally and badly. I drive her home, listen to her, let her be angry. I hug her goodbye and speak courage and hope to her. Two days later, Leyla's world looks different. She is now very grateful for the professional help from the dentist.



I am a journalist and I write down the life stories of women who have lived in prostitution and want to share their story. Also for women from Heartwings. Often I have to steal the time somewhere else to do this, but I have never regretted it. I have learned that something happens when two women sit together - one speaks, and the other listens without judging or giving any advice. I have experienced that in this simple act of talking and listening, something can happen. What exactly is not in my hand. It can lighten the heart for a short moment, it can initiate a process of change, sometimes something heals. And not only in the life of the woman telling their tale. Also in the life of the woman who listens. In my life.



I have been with Heartwings for more than two years now and teach weekly German lessons. Impressed and spurred on by the discipline and progress of the women, I look forward to the lessons every Thursday. It is neither my ambition nor my expertise to teach someone grammatically perfect High German. My goal is to give the women a feeling for the language so that they can find their way in everyday life. In the two years, I was able to witness several times what empowerment and encouragement do to a person's self-confidence and how that then has a very concrete effect on life. It gives you security to be able to understand or speak the language of the country you are in, even a little goes a long way. Almost all of us have probably experienced how helpless we feel when we are in a place where we are not understood and or able to communicate. I have also learn a lot about myself on these Thursdays, about being human, about being too quick to judgment and about how much depth can be communicated without speaking a single word of the same language. I take apart my mother tongue and thus encounter it anew, which is exciting.

## NICOLETA \* TELLS HER STORY

Nicoleta was 15 years old when an acquaintance lured her to his apartment under a pretext. There he abused her. Nicoleta's family did not want to press charges. They settled it differently: with an arranged marriage. The next 14 years were "no life," as Nicoleta says. It was only quarrels and stress. A son was born. Her husband drank, didn't work, spent his time at slot machines and with other women. There was no money to eat. Her husband told her every day: you are ugly, you stink, you are a bad person. What he said about her ate into her soul. Nicoleta began to believe what she heard. "In my life there was no love. Not once did he kiss me. I lived in a tiny box. Outside I saw the women who had a life, who were happy. I longed so much for life." When Nicoleta was 27 years old, her husband left her for his second family. Although Nicoleta never got anything good from him, she says it was still a shock. For three months, she cried, she said. A short time later, she met a woman who had money, wore gold jewelry, and asked Nicoleta if she knew any women who wanted to work in prostitution. Nicoleta was a single parent at the time, had no money, and wanted nothing more than to provide a good life for her son and no longer be dependent on her mother. That is why she said to the woman, "I do." The woman took her to Germany, Nicoleta was there for two months, she cried a lot. "I didn't even know what a condom was at that time". For the next 15 years, she did not want to work in prostitution, but still could not find a way out. From 2017, she also worked on Langstrasse in Zurich. In all these years, she says, she was in constant turmoil: home in Bulgaria for a while, back to prostitution, cleaning in a private household, back to the streets, back to Bulgaria, back to the streets, back to her son, back to prostitution. Her life? Constant survival.



Every day Nicoleta called her son. She was sad that she could not be with him. She was afraid that he would be laughed at in school because his father had left him and his mother worked abroad. So she bought him everything. She didn't treat herself to anything. There was so much stress in her head - what can I eat, how can I pay for the room, what will happen tomorrow, where can I sleep if I don't earn the money for rent? "I couldn't think clearly during that time in prostitution, I couldn't make plans either."

One day, a colleague from Langstrasse told her that she now had a "normal" job - at Heartwings' integration project, as a cleaning lady. Nicoleta knew, "I want that, too." She fought for this job. If work started at 09:00am, Nicoleta was there at 08:00. She has now been a contracted employee at Heartwings since March. She cleans the apartments and houses of the cleaning customers. Her life, Nicoleta says, has not changed 100 percent - "1000 percent!" With this job, she says, peace has returned to her mind. Although she now has less money than before, it's always "more than enough now." She's also been able to start a new relationship with a good man. There's finally love in her life, understanding and consideration. Recently, the now 44-year-old was with her boyfriend in a restaurant at the lake of Zurich. They ate for 100 francs. Something like that would have been unthinkable before, she says. "But now I'm free. I can breathe." And when Nicoleta looks in the mirror today, she likes the woman she sees - that's new, too. Heartwings reached out to her and pulled her out of the quagmire. "Heartwings is like my family. They always understand me. It's important to have someone who understands you." Nicoleta also dares to dream again. Her wish is to return to Bulgaria with her husband and open a hairdressing business there.

"TODAY I LIKE TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR AGAIN"

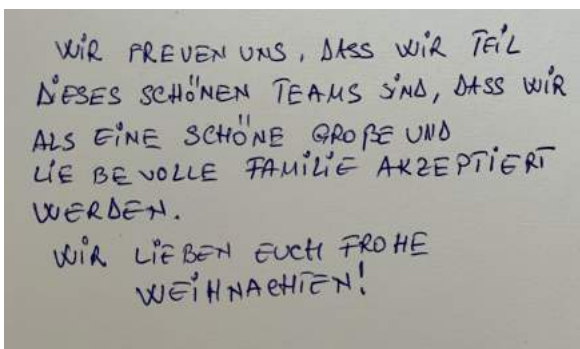
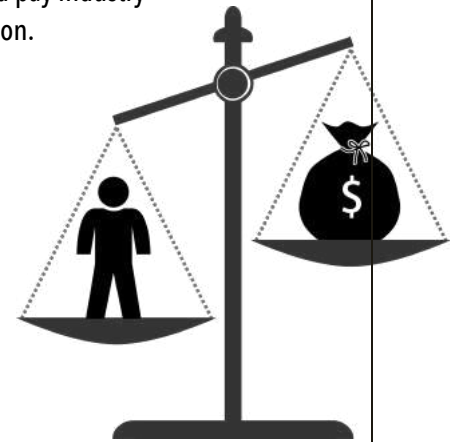
# ACCOMPANYING WOMEN OUT OF PROSTITUTION IS NOT WORTH IT...

An exit process is never straightforward and is characterized by ups and downs. Every second or third attempt that a former prostitute needs causes additional costs. There is no guarantee of success. If we look at the bare figures, a former prostitute costs us more than CHF 50,000 per year. The income that Employment for Freedom (our integration project) brings in is therefore disproportionate to expenditure. Nevertheless, we stand in the rift and pay industry-standard wages so that the financial pressure does not drive the women back into prostitution.

Our charity's finances are heavily burdened by this and we need to experience a real miracle to finish this year in the plus.

But at Heartwings the human being is in the foreground. It is about every single woman; about Nicoleta, Leyla, Céline and the many others. They are worth it! And we know: They don't change because we train them away from their old life with rules and threats. Change happens because we keep giving them a chance, even though they don't deserve it. Because we give favor and advance trust when they have squandered it. Because we accept them into our Heartwings family and give them space for their individual development and growth.

Real love gives everything, even if nothing comes back. Love stands in the chasm.



This card was written to us by the former prostitutes. It expresses the words that they often cannot say. The transformation they have gone through in the last few months was possible because people (donors, dentists, German teachers, carers, board of directors, and more) have stood in the gap. As a donor, you are a big part of making it possible for these women to experience real change. And the desire for change is great: women are queuing up to get out of prostitution. To accommodate more women and save on rental costs, we have long dreamed of a

Heartwings House. In this house, women would receive round-the-clock holistic help, protection, social support and reintegration. For now, our options are limited, but we are hopeful and excited to see what becomes possible.

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE - THANKS TO YOU!

THANK YOU, THAT YOU STAND IN THE GAP. WITH YOUR FINANCES AND GIFTS YOU MAKE CHANGE POSSIBLE.

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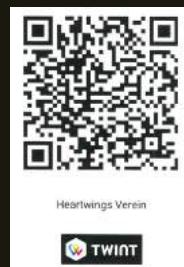
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