

heartwings newsletter



HEARTWINGS VEREIN - HEARTWINGS.CH - ERSCHEINT 2 MAL JÄHRLICH

THE MOMENTS IN BETWEEN.

How a picture
found the right
woman, you can
read about in our
cover story.

We do everything we can to help women leave prostitution behind: We provide jobs, housing and German courses, arrange residence permits, and offer debt counselling and psychological support. Our experience shows just how important all of this is. But equally important is what lies beyond our control: embracing the moments that arise completely unexpectedly. Often, these are the moments when something truly significant happens. In this newsletter, we share some of these moments in between.

Let yourself be surprised.

With lots of love from the Heartwings team

1/26

UNEXPECTED

A woman dropped by with a painting she had made herself. She had a feeling it was meant for a “very special woman.” Now, that could have been a rather strange moment. But anyone who knows us knows: We love surprises!

What happened the following week is best told by Heartwings team member Bindu herself:

“It was my first day back after the holidays. A coun-

selling session was scheduled for the morning. My colleague had a clash in her calendar and asked if I could take it instead. To be honest, we weren't even sure whether the woman's situation had anything to do with prostitution – so it was pure coincidence that I ended up meeting her.

The woman has a specific problem, and we are now working with her to find a good solution. But what I really want to tell

you about is something else: This woman is transgender. She underwent gender-affirming surgery when she was young. That was many, many years ago. She is Indian, and so am I. And now, here we were, sitting opposite each other in Zurich.

I need to explain something here: Trans people in India are treated like dirt. Hardly anyone would intentionally touch a trans woman, and they are often left completely

vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. No one wants to give them a job either. And so, circumstances forced this woman, like so many trans women around the world, into prostitution.

I was able to speak with

her in her mother tongue. We hugged and cried together. During our conversation, I gave her the painting we had received for “that special woman” – it depicts a beautiful woman.

The artwork visibly mo-

ved her. For her, it was an affirmation of her identity and a symbol of beauty and hope in the midst of pain and trauma. She could hardly believe that we were giving it to her.

It was a healing morning – for both of us. She ex-

perienced someone from her own culture meeting her as an equal and honouring her as a beautiful, strong woman. As we said goodbye, I kissed her on the cheek. In that moment, something happened – something I cannot put into words.”



Bindu has been part of the Heartwings team since last year.

“I WAS ABLE TO SPEAK WITH HER IN HER MOTHER TONGUE. WE HUGGED AND CRIED TOGETHER», BINDU RECALLS.

“SO THAT LEAVING BECOMES A REAL POSSIBILITY AND NOT JUST A WISH.

To me, prostitution is not a job like any other. It reflects power dynamics in which one person's needs are met at the expense of another person's physical and personal boundaries. I dream of a Switzerland where no one has to sell their body in order to survive. That is what I am committed to.



Jael

Jael Schwendimann
Managing Director
Heartwings

FROM OUR EVERYDAY WORK

A woman makes an appointment and tells us her life story in the space of an hour. Far too much, really, for one lifetime. She is almost 70. We listen to her. None of what happened can be undone. We share in her pain and tell her that we believe her. It is not the first time we have seen how healing a sincere “I believe you” can be.

The women in the brothels are happy when we visit them with gifts. They say: “You are so kind. Ot-

her women are always judging us for what we do.” And once again, we realise: What seems completely natural to us – people treating one another with kindness – is anything but natural for women in prostitution.

“We visit a club and say goodbye. I am almost at the door when one of the women comes running after me. She wants to hug me one more time. Her hug turns into a tight embrace. She simply doesn't

want to let go.”

“At a brothel, I ask one of the women her name. She says: ‘Isabelle.’ No. ‘Eva.’ No. ‘Christina.’ Then, apologetically, she says: ‘I have many names.’ I ask her: ‘Which one is your favourite?’ She says: ‘I don't know.’”

Unlike in almost any other line of work, women in prostitution rarely work under their own first name. The world of prostitution robs people even of their own name.

AMAZING, *Graziella*

Heartwings
wonder

At the beginning of September, we celebrated Graziella completing business school. In her own words, this is what this important moment means to her:

“Just a few years ago, people said: Graziella, you have nothing. No education, no secure income to provide for your son, no family to support you. And my past came with a label that others had given me: ‘Whore.’ As if that were all I am. As if my past in forced prostitution could determine what my future was allowed to look like.



But they were wrong:

Today, I stand here with my diploma, my own car, a home, a new family, my son, my own business, my website, and an incredible team by my side. I am not the label others put on me. I am a mother. I am a graduate. I am a survivor. I am a woman with a voice, a future and a story whose ending I get to write myself.”

She did it!
Celebrating with her son.
Graduating from business school.

Wow! OUR BEAUTIFUL BASEMENT

Nachher
Our new basement space for Jenny's inclusion sessions.



Space is in short supply at our premises on Zurich's Langstrasse. So every day, it takes a great deal of organisational talent to juggle all our appointments and different needs.

That's why we're delighted to present our latest strategy – ta-daaaaa: creating space where there is none.

We didn't know it oursel-

ves, but apparently this is yet another of the many talents of Heartwings team member Jenny.

Here's how it all came about: Jenny needed a room of her own for her inclusion sessions.

The only problem: we didn't have a spare room. But Jenny thought: “We have the basement!”

Now, we should mention: it

was a truly dreadful basement, filled with all sorts of stuff, as well as the washing machine and dryer. But Jenny saw what wasn't there yet. With lights, curtains, paint and friends who pitched in, she created a room within a room.

And now we still have a basement for all our stuff – but Jenny finally has a beautiful space where dreams can take root and the future can begin.



Before
Our basement with washing machine, dryer and all sorts of stored items.

On the other side

” **Most women are manipulated into prostitution – just as I used to manipulate women into it myself** – and then work for a pimp until they no longer ‘function’, meaning they no longer

bring in money. Some eventually manage to break free and work independently, but that doesn't change the fact that they did not enter prostitution voluntarily.»



Kassra Zargaran was on the other side. He was a pimp and a Hells Angel before leaving that world behind. Today, he lives under a witness protection programme. In an interview with the SonntagsZeitung, he speaks plainly about the reality of prostitution.

His new book, «Die Strasse vergisst nicht» (Riva Verlag) will be published in November. You can find the full interview via the QR code.



«IT'S THESE MOMENTS IN BETWEEN THAT MAKE IT ALL WORTHWHILE.»

Interview

SPEAK UP

Speak Up! is HEART-WINGS' school-based prevention programme addressing digital and sexual exploitation. In 90-minute workshops, it empowers young people aged 12 to 18 to recognise manipulation, set boundaries and seek help. Resource-oriented, practical and hopeful.

More informationen:
heartwings.ch/speak-up

Claudia, prevention is your passion. Why?

Claudia: Because when we go out to meet women in prostitution, I meet women who were once girls – with dreams, with a name, with a dignity that no one should ever have taken from them. If we were to hear their stories backwards, almost none of them would begin with violence.

So where do they begin?

They all begin with attention. With compliments. With someone suddenly saying: "I understand you like no one else does. Your family doesn't understand you, but I do." That's how manipulation begins. That's how the loveboy method begins. That's how cyber grooming begins. Not loudly and brutally, but quietly and warmly.

Prevention can make the difference?

Yes. In almost every one of these stories, there is a moment when a single piece of knowledge could have changed everything. A girl who knew: "What he is doing has a name. This is love bombing, this is isolation, this is a pattern." That is exactly the knowledge I want to give young people – along with the message: "You are worth more than this."

How do you experience the young people in your workshops?

They have a very fine sense of whether you reduce them to their mistakes and risks, or whether you believe in their strength. As soon as they realise that you believe in them, they open up. That's when the real questions come. They almost never ask

them out loud in front of the whole class, but quietly, on the sidelines. After the lesson, when everyone else has already left the room. It's these moments on the sidelines that I do this for.

What kind of questions do they ask?

Again and again, I hear the question: "Do you know someone this has happened to?" And behind it, so often, is an unspoken "This happened to me" that they are not

quite ready to say out loud.

What do you do in those moments?

When it becomes clear that someone has been affected, my role is not to become their therapist – my job is to build bridges and show them the way to professional help. Never carry it alone, always connect them with the right support. That is a principle I take very seriously.

Claudia studied Health Promotion and Prevention at ZHAW in Winterthur and has herself travelled a long road of recovery and resilience. Through her work at Heartwings, she has first-hand knowledge of the mechanisms of manipulation and dependency.

Why is this issue so close to your heart?

The world young people live in has changed radically in just a few years. Social media, algorithms and artificial intelligence all shape what is considered "normal": in appearance, status, relationships and sexuality. Pornography often shapes ideas about intimacy, boundaries and dignity before a young person has even had their first experience of their own. Identity becomes blurred between who you really are and who a profile or a feed tells you that you should be. Young people today carry a burden unlike anything previous generations have experienced in this form.

If you could give young people just one sentence to take with them, what would it be?

«Your dignity is inviolable.»



I WANT TO COME
TO YOUR PLACE.
Is it possible?

On Thursday, we visited a sauna club as part of our outreach work. By Monday, one of the women had already asked when she could come by for a conversation. And hers is not the only initial consultation in our calendar this week. We are deeply moved by this trust. And we know: We need many miracles to find individual, sustainable solutions for each of these courageous women.



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*It's possible! Thanks
to your donation.
Merci vielmal's!*

«COME WITH
ME. I KNOW
WHERE
YOU CAN GET
HELP.»

That's what Karin said to a colleague from Langstrasse – and then brought her to our office..

We were able to help her colleague find a job outside prostitution. And it's not the first time Karin has brought a woman to us who then went on to start a new life. But Karin herself has wanted to leave prostitution for a long time. She has three children, however, and the financial pressure is immense – and even greater is her fear of everything she will face when she leaves. So Karin is still in prostitution. And even though she herself is struggling, she is changing other people's lives for the better.

We admire her. And we sincerely hope that one day, in her own time and with the security she needs, she will take that step herself.

