

What is AAGW?

“The Association for Albanian Girls and Women” (AAGW) is a nonprofit humanitarian organization to assist victims of human trafficking in Albania. It is estimated that there are more than 6,000 Albanian girls and women who are or have been victims of legal trafficking for the purpose of prostitution, one third of whom are younger than eighteen.

Albanian girls fall victim to this type of sexual exploitation through a combination of deception and violence. Typically, a teenage Albanian girl becomes the prey of a young man who feigns falling in love with her, proposes, and whisks her off to what she believes will be a fairytale life in a western country. In reality, the young man is a pimp, a paid employee of a well-organized and sophisticated illegal trafficking network. In other characteristic scenarios, the girls are duped into thinking they have been hired for a legitimate job as a domestic worker, waitress, or nanny in a western European country. Once in control of the trafficker, however, the girls are threatened, abused, raped, and forcibly mugged out of Albania; their passports and official documents are seized. They are then sold and resold from one organized crime syndicate to another, and the treatment they receive is unspeakable. Some are deprived of food; many are beaten regularly.

Most of the Albanian women and girls are trafficked to Italy and Greece, but some are trafficked as far as England and Belgium. Not only are the victims physically and emotionally abused, but some contract AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Younger girls are most sought after (and the most valuable to traffickers) because they are virgins and carry no risk of AIDS. If the girls become pregnant, they are forced to have abortions. Some traffickers intentionally addict the girls to drugs to maintain control.

To make matters worse, corruption is a rampant problem in Albania, and police officers are easily bribed to look the other way and even actively participate in trafficking. Complicating the situation, a number of girls are actually kidnapped, often from small villages; some are even sold by their families for money. Some of the “lucky” ones manage to escape; others are unfortunately arrested by non-corrupt police officers who then deport them back to Albania where there are two

shelters to house them, one in the capital and the other in a smaller town. All of the victims are in various stages of post-traumatic stress. The shelters have social workers who counsel them, and the victims' stories are so distressing that the social workers need secondary counseling themselves to cope.

The average age of a victim in a shelter here is seventeen; the youngest girls are thirteen. Many of the girls have nowhere else to go. Due to the shame associated with prostitution, many fathers will not accept their daughters back into the family. AAGW supports a number of projects to aid the shelter residents, including vocational training and job placement as well as fundraisers to provide handicraft materials.

Some of the issues the young women face include psychological trauma resulting from forced sexual exploitation, lack of education and job training, poverty, lack of opportunities, cultural misogyny, dysfunctional families, hopelessness, depression, lack of self-esteem, violence, endangerment to personal health and safety, and social stigma (from society at large as well as their own families who shun them). We hope to address these issues by serving as a tool for personal empowerment. These young women have been robbed of their human dignity. Our organization seeks to help them restore it.



AAGW is headquartered in the Albanian capital of Tirana

AAGW Programs

Job Training and Placement Programs: AAGW and its supporters work independently and in cooperation with the IOM (International Office of Migration) and other NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and Albanian organizations and vocational programs to provide targeted job skills training ranging from general orientation in “workplace expectations” to vocation-specific training. AAGW also works jointly with the IOM and a targeted group of employers to place former trafficked women into safe and constructive work environments. AAGW has recently found work for five former victims

Handicrafts Production: AAGW supplements the IOM program by providing center residents with materials and training in artistic handicrafts. There are three reasons such activity is beneficial. The first is the inherent therapeutic value of the creative process. Manual artistry is psychologically soothing and rehabilitative, and these girls urgently need emotional rehabilitation. Second, producing a work of art which is beautiful and valuable in the eyes of others is beneficial for the development of self-esteem. These are girls who lack even the minimum of self-respect, and seeing that others view their work favorably aids in building a positive self-image. Finally, the money for all items sold goes directly to the artist: themselves. Earning money from the work of one’s own hands is helpful emotionally as well as financially.

Building Leadership Skills: Another important purpose of our association is to provide leadership opportunities for trafficking victims to take a role in supervising the activities of the organization. The president and other leaders of the group are victims themselves and have been elected by victims. The members decide for themselves the activities the organization will sponsor and how funds will be used. They decide, for example, which handicrafts to make, which materials they need, and how to budget the money. Such a process is educational and provides important financial, interpersonal, and decision-making skills.

Giving Victims a Voice: “Shoqata Shqiptare per Vajza dhe Grat” gives victims of trafficking a voice. Giving these girls and women a public platform will hopefully improve not only how the women view themselves, but also how others in society view them. We hope to cooperate with other NGOs dealing with trafficking and women’s issues to help create a cooperative network of organizations that address different aspects of the trafficking problem. The elected leadership is learning how to raise funds, and members themselves decide the course and future goals of the organization. No other such organization exists here to provide a voice for this marginalized group in Albanian society.

About AAGW

Our organization is created by and for former victims of human trafficking in Albania. The members are girls and women who have been trafficked and forced into prostitution. Our primary aim is to assist victims of trafficking reintegrate into Albanian society. They come to the IOM Center for Reintegration literally with nothing and we hope to help provide them not only with the necessities to begin a new and better life, but also with the self-esteem and job skills to do so successfully. We seek to achieve this goal by supporting job training, job placement, and handicraft production programs. Equally important, since the organization is run by and for trafficked women, its daily operation provides important leadership and managerial experience for members.

There are usually about thirty girls and women living in the primary trafficking shelter in Tirana, the capital of Albania. More victims are arriving all the time. These girls/women are the beneficiaries of our organization, but they are also its members and leaders.

Amy Sebes is the Founder / Director of AAGW. Amy began working with trafficking victims after writing the national anti-trafficking curriculum which have been implemented in Albanian middle and high schools since 2002. After graduating from Stanford University in 1988 with a BA in Psychology and Tufts University with an MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching), Amy spent the next ten years as a teacher. She has taught high school English in the United States, remedial English to U.S. Army soldiers stationed in Berlin, Germany, and English as a second language at Georgetown University and Ewha University in Seoul, Korea. She has worked on three continents with students of all age groups from pre-kindergarten to college and is a recipient of the Tufts University Outstanding Teacher Special Recognition Award and the Johns Hopkins University Teacher Recognition Award for exemplary work in the field of education..

“F.O.” is the second elected president of AAGW. Her election earlier this year was an important step for AAGW in empowering the young women who have been victims of human trafficking. She is 21 years old and is from Tropoja, Albania. For reasons of security, her identity must be kept private.

How You Can Help

1. Make a financial contribution through our PayPal account at www.aagw.org. We partner with “Captive Daughters,” a worldwide anti-trafficking organization, to ensure that your donation is tax-deductible. All donations will be spent directly on handicraft production materials, and to compensate the women for their labor.
2. Purchase handicraft items made by the former victims at our website at aagw.org.
3. Make copies of this brochure to inform others about AAGW and the problem of human trafficking.
4. Donate items used in handicrafts made by the victims (ribbons, yarn, etc.), or sponsor a sale of their handmade items. Contact AAGW’s Alison McGann (info@aagw.org) for more information about getting involved with the handmade work that boosts victims’ self esteem and provides income to the girls and the shelter.
5. Think of other fundraising ideas and contact us.

For more information on AAGW, contact:

Association of Albanian Girls and Women
Amy L. Sebes, Founder and Director
amyandtom@sebes-vajda.com

“F.O.”, President

For reasons of security, her identity must be kept private.

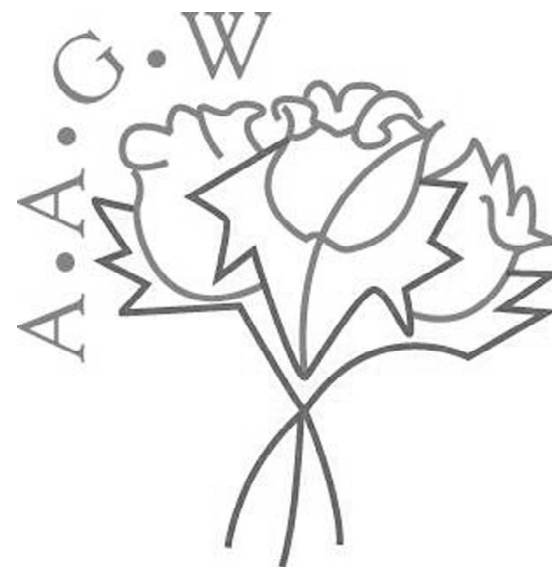
U.S. Contact
Alison McGann
info@aagw.org

Media Inquiries
Linda Reid
lindreid@aol.com
(310) 291-9205

Website
www.aagw.org

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This new logo was designed
a victim at the Tirana shelter

a non-profit humanitarian
organization to assist victims
of human trafficking