

Off the



Market



Lucy Mahaffey didn't wait to join a movement to stop human trafficking, she started her own. Now her work has led to Washington, D.C

Twenty-year-old Lucy Mahaffey has spent nearly half her life working to end human trafficking.

Her passion was unexpectedly ignited when, at age 12, Mahaffey decided one rainy day to watch a favorite movie, "Amazing Grace." She had seen the story of former English slave trader John Newton, who converted to Christianity and became an adamant opponent of slavery, many times. This time, though, she watched the special features included in the DVD.

"They were talking about modern slavery," remembers Mahaffey, a University of Oklahoma junior. "I had no idea it existed. I was in the seventh grade and had just learned how slavery in America ended with the Emancipation Proclamation. I immediately thought about my twin sister, Rosemary, and knew that if this happened to her I would not stop until she was free."

BY DEBRA LEVY MARTINELLI
PHOTOS PROVIDED



A high school video curriculum Mahaffey created on human trafficking has already reached thousands of Oklahoma students and helped earn the 20-year-old the 2014 City of Norman Human Rights Award.

The second I realized I could do something about it, my life absolutely changed.”

Mahaffey started talking to people online to figure out how she could help. A family member connected her with Oklahoma Against Trafficking Humans. She worked with OATH for about five years and got involved planning com-

are between 21 and 35 million people currently held against their will.

Through the internship, Mahaffey conducts research and interviews and coordinates logistics for a comprehensive study of the anti-trafficking movement and an analysis of how Free the Slaves can be an integral part of it. The project, Vision 2025, is a collaboration between Free the Slaves and Deloitte Consulting, which contributes a pro bono consulting team.

“I’m doing lots of research, interviews, phone calls and logistics,” she explains. “This project has the potential to be a very critical document in the movement.”

Mahaffey approaches her work the same way she approaches just about everything else she does. “If I see something that needs to get

done, I just try to do it,” she says. “I learned that from my family. My parents are both very determined individuals. They’re really very interested in humanity and compassion. For me, it’s important to get other people involved in any capacity, and letting them know that they have personal power. I had that moment where I realized I had personal power, but I want

“I try to take the approach that everybody has something, but you may not even know what it is. It’s important to self-reflect and ask, ‘What can I contribute?’”

munity events. “It kind of escalated from there, and here I am,” she says.

“Here” is a semester-long internship with Free the Slaves, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization dedicated to ending slavery worldwide. The organization estimates there

people to know that they have it, too.”

Mahaffey does that by helping people see that they have their own special view of the world and their place in it. “Whether you’re a lawyer or a student or a doctor or an investment banker, you have your own set of perceptions of the world and that’s very valuable,” she relates. “Also, you have your own ‘something’ – maybe it’s that you love baking cupcakes and you want to have a bake sale. I try to take the approach that everybody has something, but you may not even know what it is. It’s important to self-reflect and ask, ‘What can I contribute?’”

After Mahaffey had her own eureka moment eight years ago, it was easy to stay committed to anti-trafficking. “Once you meet survivors and hear their stories and you’re face-to-face with the reality of human trafficking, you can’t *not* do something about it,” she says.

One of her many “somethings” was creating an online high school video curriculum on human trafficking that tells the story of an Oklahoma survivor with whom Mahaffey had become friends.

The video already has reached thousands of Oklahoma students. When she returns to OU next fall, she will study the effectiveness of the video curriculum with funding from an Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program grant awarded jointly by the OU Honors College and the Office of the Provost.

Mahaffey received the 2014 City of Norman Human Rights Award for her anti-trafficking work. Sponsored annually by the Norman Human Rights Commission, the award recognizes individuals or organizations who have shown outstanding effort, achievement and/or leadership in the promotion of human rights and equality.

“It was really flattering and encouraging and an amazing experience,” she recalls. “When I went to the award ceremony, I learned that the winner last year was the whole City of Norman Police Department.”

When she completes her multidisciplinary course of study – a major in international studies and double minor in anthropology and Spanish – Mahaffey plans to continue her quest to wipe out human trafficking.

“Anthropology shows how humanity has progressed over time and why we have the problems we have today. International studies looks at what’s going on now and what’s likely to hap-



Lucy Mahaffey (left), with brother, David, and twin sister, Rosemary. Rosemary works for Women Without Borders in Austria and helped inspire Lucy’s commitment to end human trafficking. “I knew that if this happened to her I would not stop until she was free,” she says.



Mahaffey’s journey into human trafficking brought her to an internship with the Washington, D.C.-based Free the Slaves, which estimates that between 21 and 35 million people worldwide are held against their will.



Mahaffey and friends founded OU's "Off the Market: Putting an End to Human Trafficking" symposium in 2014 featuring Kevin Bales, a Pulitzer Prize-nominated global expert on human trafficking.


pen in the future," she says. "I definitely intend to do this work after I graduate. I don't know specifically in what facet, but I'm very interested in economic and public policy."

Meanwhile, she continues to reach out to get others involved.

Mahaffey and some friends noticed there were many events and lectures at OU about human trafficking, but a collective effort was lacking. In response they founded a symposium called "Off the Market: Putting an End to Human Trafficking" by engaging a wide variety of departments and organizations both on and off campus. The first symposium in fall 2014 featured keynote speaker Kevin Bales, a global expert on human trafficking, author of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated book, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, and co-founder of Free the Slaves. Mahaffey says a second symposium is in the works.

In January, she spoke at the fourth annual Technology, Entertainment, Design Conference at OU, known as TEDxOU, about her journey from becoming interested in human trafficking to being involved in stopping it. Mahaffey's message was that anyone can be an agent of change.

"The four main points I made at the TEDxOU talk are the points I make wherever I go," she explains. "First, realize the personal power that you have. Second, become not only aware of, but attentive to, the world around you because so much is going on every day. It's real and when you see these children who cut off their own fingers because they can't feel them any more while they're processing fish – it's like being in two worlds. Third, understand the framework. The goal of the Off the Market symposium was to create a place where people could gather for a common purpose.

"Finally, look at things with an interdisciplinary perspective. Most people don't know that doctors in the ER are often the first people to see the survivors of trafficking. Statisticians may not be the first professionals to come to mind when discussing human trafficking, but they are crucial to efforts to quantify the numbers and make projections. We all have the power to make a difference." 

Debra Levy Martinelli is principal of LevyMart Public Relations in Norman. She writes freelance articles for Sooner Magazine.