

Today, we celebrate six strong years of Living in Freedom Together.

Dear friends,

We have come a long way since our founding in 2014 and have had the privilege of supporting the most incredibly resilient, kind, compassionate, and strong survivors. Survivors who inspire us every day to continue to push forward and advocate for systemic change and for accessible services designed to support the unique needs of survivors of systems of prostitution. We have advocated for legislative change to stop the criminalization of this marginalized and disenfranchised group of people, to expand quality exit services, and to hold pimps and buyers accountable through penalties for those who choose to buy and harm victims of the sex trade.

2020 has come with its challenges and hardships, and LIFT has had our share of struggle and loss. Nevertheless, we proudly persist alongside our incredible team of survivors and allies as we work to end prostitution and take hold of the opportunities that await us.

In 2020, and looking toward 2021, LIFT will continue to create, provide, and expand services and supports for prostituted people in our community. We dream big at LIFT, but dreams do not come to fruition without perseverance and hard work. Some of our dreams are to house all our services under one roof in a program called HARBOR - Healthcare, Advocacy, Room, Board, Outreach, Re-Housing. HARBOR is a collaborative initiative uniting multiple community partners to create and support a day program and a 15-bed overnight shelter for women experiencing homelessness, commercial sexual exploitation, substance/opioid use disorder, and or mental health disorders. At LIFT, we take a proactive approach to the public health crises that is prostitution. HARBOR will provide solutions for this population in the form of intensive case management, peer mentorship, access to healthcare and treatment programs, advocacy in the court system, DCF matters, and the healthcare system, access to stabilization resources (SNAP, SSI, etc.), and rapid re-housing support. We are currently seeking support for this project, and are excited to see it come to life.

Empathy is at the heart of everything we do, and this year, our team has reflected on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the diverse survivor population, compounding pre-existing traumas and exacerbating health inequities across gender and racial lines. This summer, we were awarded a \$2,000 Action for Racial Equity grant from the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, and we are committed to using these funds to train our staff on recognizing implicit biases and prejudice, and how to put anti-racism into action throughout our public health and social service programming.

This year, LIFT and fellow radical feminist organizations celebrated the 26th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act being signed into law which "creates and supports comprehensive, cost-effective responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. Since its enactment, VAWA programs, administered by the U.S. Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Health and Human Services (HHS), have dramatically improved federal, tribal, state, and local responses to these crimes" (nnedv.org).

While this legislation has helped support incredible work throughout our nation, we at LIFT know our fight for women's freedom from violence and oppression is far from over. This October, we invite you to join us in raising awareness of commercial sexual exploitation and ways to close on-ramps into *the life*. You can learn more about our fundraiser and how to get involved here <https://runsignup.com/Race/MA/Worcester/LIFTScaryTruth>. Funds raised will go directly to supporting accelerating the pace of LIFT's outreach and advocacy work throughout Massachusetts and beyond.

Despite this being a time where women's rights and marginalized people are under attack, we will continue to work with our city government, our partners in the state legislature, and our allies in congress to fight for implementation of the Equality Model. We will continue to advocate for meaningful legislative changes that will protect survivors, increase funding and opportunities for survivor-led exit programs, and hold pimps and buyers accountable for the violence and destruction they perpetuate.

Legislative change is essential to ending systems of prostitution and providing viable exit opportunities and pathways to sustainable recovery, but there can be no real solution to ending systems of prostitution without the cooperation of the community. Survivors of prostitution need the opportunity to build a life outside of *the life*. We are holding ourselves, our community members, state and local officials, and business leaders accountable in stepping up and standing by us in implementing real change.

Sex work is not work. It is the exploitation of our most vulnerable community members. LIFT will continue to fight until all systems of prostitution are recognized for what they truly are - systems of gender-based violence and oppression, and mechanisms of gender inequality. Our vision includes a community where survivors are embraced with choices, dignity, and inclusion; where vulnerable people are no longer bought and sold for sex. We know our supporters share this vision, and we are thankful to all those working alongside us to make this a reality and not a far-fetched dream.

This year is not over, and we stand by the words of the late but ever-present Toni Morrison: "just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."

We look forward to forging a united path, ~living in freedom together~.

In solidarity,

Nicole Bell and the leadership of LIFT