

## Haven ATL fights trafficking in Atlanta

**The Salvation Army works to undercut country's largest commercial sex industry.**

*By Tamara Stinson –*

Atlanta is one of only eight U.S. cities classified as an “alpha-world city” by the [Globalization and World Cities Research Network](#) and ranks fourth in the number of Fortune 500 companies headquartered within city boundaries, yet it's another economy in Atlanta that's stealing the attention.

According to a 2014 [study](#) from the Urban Institute (UI), Atlanta ranks first among U.S. cities for commercial sexual exploitation. In 2007 alone, its underground sex economy netted an estimated \$290 million.

It's numbers like this that keep Hillary DeJarnett up at night. As co-founder and program director of [Haven ATL](#), DeJarnett and her team, including Co-Founder Captain Sandra Pawar, work to help women transition from victims of sex trafficking to leaders in their communities.

“These girls are powerful,” DeJarnett said. “They're smart. They're intelligent. They just really need support and they need to be held accountable and have a place to grow, so that's what we try to do.”

The idea for Haven ATL came to DeJarnett while working on her master's thesis in nonprofit management at the University of Georgia. The assignment turned into a full-time job after DeJarnett presented the idea to Pawar. The pair then established Haven ATL as a Salvation Army program.

“We are located in a neighborhood in Atlanta where commercial sexual exploitation is very prevalent and visible,” Pawar explained. “Before Hillary presented the idea of Haven ATL, I spent a lot of time praying in front of strips clubs and brothels. I even began building relationships with women in that lifestyle and inviting them to the corps. I asked God to guide me on this mission and he sent Hillary and Haven ATL my way.”

The UI report states that the underground commercial sex economy in the Atlanta area is mainly comprised of three sex trafficking venues: street and online prostitution, Latino brothels, and massage parlors. There is also a significant amount of pimp-controlled prostitution on the street and online via



websites such as Craigslist and Backpage.

Haven ATL works to reverse this damage out of The Salvation Army's 53,000-square-foot [Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center](#) in the Pittsburgh neighborhood. Later this year, Haven ATL will move into its own drop-in center and offices. The donated house, also in the Pittsburgh community, will provide a more intimate setting for the 20 women involved to access counseling, mentorship, job training, cooking classes, yoga and Bible study. In the backyard, there's a community garden to teach the women about farming and landscaping.

"I think the house is truly going to be that haven for the women," DeJarnett said. "A place they can come and know that they are safe and know that they are loved."

Pam, a former madam who turned to the sex trade after her family was displaced by Hurricane Katrina, sought help at Haven ATL after being arrested. She is now one of the organization's community leaders and helps get women, girls and transgendered individuals out of the industry rather than into it.

"I kept trying to do it by myself and I kept falling back into it," Pam said. "If you're already thinking about changing, Haven ATL is the place to actually make it happen."