



alexandra woods '01

- **Profession:** South Asia Regional Programs Manager at *Free the Slaves*; previously, Assistant Director of Development for *City of Hope* in San Francisco
- **Education:** B. A. in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley; Masters in International Human Rights from the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver
- **Current Residence:** Washington, D.C.

Working at the forefront of the devastating global issue of human trafficking and slavery is Alexandra (Alex) Woods '01, who has made it her life's work to fight for the rights of adults and children who have been robbed of their dignity and freedom. As the South Asia Regional Programs Manager for Free the Slaves (FTS), a worldwide organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., Alex manages partnerships with grassroots organizations that empower vulnerable people and communities to achieve freedom from, and develop resistance to, slavery. Free the Slaves currently has programs in Ghana, India, Nepal, Haiti, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Working specifically in India and Nepal, Alex oversees programs that provide sub-grants, training, and technical assistance to local organizations that are addressing forms of human trafficking including: debt bondage/bonded labor, sex trafficking, and labor trafficking due to unsafe migration.

Alex's career in the non-profit arena began at City of Hope in San Francisco, where she was the Assistant Director of Development. With the goal of eventually working to help find solutions to issues relating to human trafficking and women's rights, Alex returned to school to earn a Master's Degree in International Human Rights in order to gain the skills and expertise she would need to effectively address the root causes of this complex social issue.

In her current role at Free the Slaves, Alex utilizes her expertise in project management, fieldwork, and project evaluation as she works with partner organizations to prevent and address child slavery by educating parents whose children are at risk about their rights and the importance of attending school, especially for girls. Alex shares that the International Labor Organization estimates that there are 21 million victims of human trafficking globally, and that human trafficking generates annual profits of \$150 billion, yet government and civil society responses are meager in comparison to the magnitude of the problem. Human traffickers use violence, threats of violence and psychological coercion to exploit their victims. In South Asia, traffickers usually live in the same geographic areas as their victims.

Moved by this devastating issue, Alex felt that it was her calling to contribute and leverage resources so that civil society and the government can scale up their responses to human trafficking, making a bigger impact. Through her position, Alex works to empower adults and girls to become leaders in their communities and to advocate for their rights. She is inspired by the courage and resilience of human rights activists, as well as current victims and survivors of trafficking. Alex shares that this work resonates strongly with her because of her education at Marymount.



Alexandra with the staff of the Punarnawa Ashram, a shelter home for survivors of sex trafficking, located in Bihar, India

“ At Marymount, social justice became a paramount value in my life. As a result, I have sought out educational and professional opportunities that address some of the most pressing social issues of our day. ”

As a student at Marymount, Alex observed directly the positive impact of providing women with the strength and confidence to speak out and to let their voices be heard. She credits the school with instilling in her the importance of girls' education and empowerment. Alex feels strongly that being in an all-girls environment with supportive faculty encourages students to not only focus on their coursework, but to become leaders. It was also at Marymount that Alex first developed an interest in non-profit and human rights work. "At Marymount," Woods reflects, "social justice became a paramount value in my life. As a result, I have sought out educational and professional opportunities that address some of the most pressing social issues of our day."

Woods still remembers her Kingdom Fair project during her Junior year, where she and partners Ann Conkle '01 and Tanya Judge '01 selected the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) as their service organization. "This was my first exposure to a non-profit work

environment," Alex shares, "and I was able to gain an understanding of the different types of career paths within the non-profit arena."

For current Marymount students with a passion for non-profit and community work, Alex recommends, "Get involved in volunteering and interning at different non-profits throughout high school and college. This way, you will be able to learn about many different issues, where your passions lie, as well as the various roles within non-profit organizations and the paths that lead to these positions."

Through her inspiring work and the essential traits of resilience and compassion, Woods has carved a path in helping to empower adults and children worldwide to live more free and empowered lives.

Editors' Note: Marymount is so honored that Alex was able to share her experiences with our community; some of whom may be considering a similar path in human rights work.