

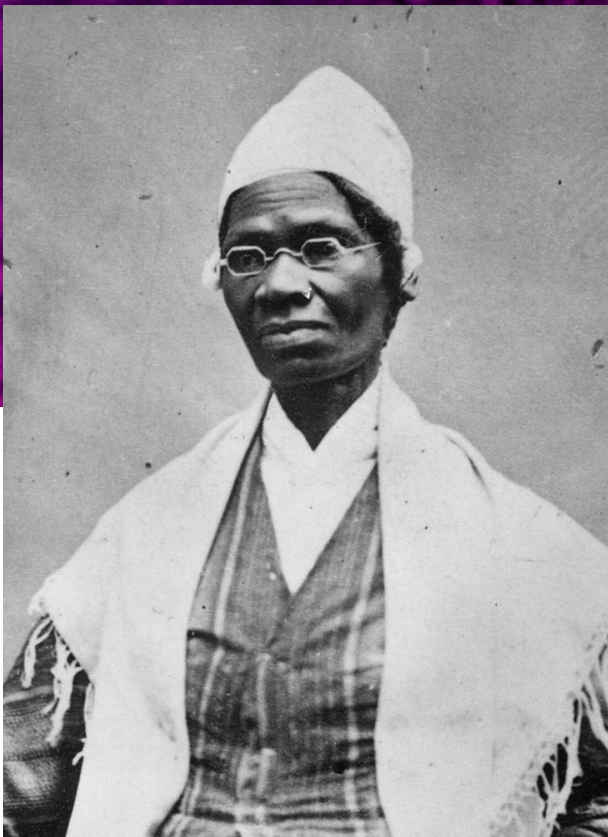


2025

# WARRIOR AWARDS

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# SOJOURNER TRUTH AWARD

## ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

This is for individuals who advocate for survivor rights and ensure their voices are heard.

Sojourner Truth was an American abolitionist and activist for African-American civil rights and Women's Rights. After the war, she even attempted to secure land grants from the federal government for formerly enslaved people.





**NIKEIDRA DEBARGE**

CEO of New Destiny Pathways Inc.

Juvenile Treatment and Support Court Probation Officer at  
Kent County 17th Circuit Court

Nikeidra Battle-DeBarge is a credible leader within the social services field with over 22 years of experience in case management, program development, and advocacy for youth and families. She is a motivated achiever with a drive to effect change within the community while helping individuals improve their health and well-being. She is committed to serving her local church and the greater West Michigan community through her professional and volunteer service roles.

In 2012, Nikeidra co-founded a nonprofit organization, New Destiny Pathways Inc, which provides affordable and supportive independent living housing to young women ages 17-21 aging out of the foster care system. New Destiny Pathways provides housing in southeast Grand Rapids along with life skills coaching, guidance, and empowerment to assist the young women in their transition to independent living. To date, New Destiny has been able to help over 65 foster care women through this program. Nikeidra does this all while parenting her 4 amazing children.

For 12 years, Nikeidra led Wedgwood Christian Services' Manasseh Project. The Manasseh Project is an outreach ministry of Wedgwood Christian Services dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of young women and men in West Michigan. In her role as coordinator, Nikeidra provided support for victims of human trafficking and empowered people of West Michigan to end sex trafficking.

Nikeidra is engaged in educating juvenile justice, counselors, social work professionals, and students in high schools, colleges, and universities about the myths and realities of human trafficking. She trains first responders, members of the court, and medical professionals who often encounter victims of sex trafficking.

Nikeidra was instrumental in developing two videos called "Stop This Traffic" and "Romeo" which have been viewed by thousands. These videos are social justice experiments that raise awareness about trafficking here in Grand Rapids. She has had the opportunity to host governmental officials from Thailand and Spain on the issues around human trafficking in the U.S. She also advocates for the promotion of services and legislative support that will assist sex trafficking victims. Most recently, Nikeidra aided Kent Intermediate School District in securing a \$1.5 million grant to provide human trafficking prevention education and a human trafficking school safety protocol within the district. Nikeidra was the lead trainer for this grant.

Nikeidra currently serves as a Juvenile Treatment and Support Court Probation Officer for the 17th Circuit Court in Kent County. In her role, she provides intensive supervision and support to youth and their families, who because of their severe mental health challenges, have become involved with the juvenile justice system.



**YASMIN Z. VAFA**

Co-founder and Executive Director of Rights4Girls

Yasmin is Co-founder and Executive Director of Rights4Girls, a national human rights organization dedicated to ending gender-based violence against young women and girls in the U.S. As a human rights attorney and advocate, Yasmin's work focuses on the intersections of race, gender, violence, and the law. She speaks widely on these issues and how they impact the lives of marginalized women and children.

She is co-author of several reports detailing the over-criminalization of girls, including the much acclaimed *Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls' Story*, which exposed the widespread criminalization of girls of color in the U.S. as a direct result of their victimization. The report has not only shaped the national conversation around women and girls' incarceration, but helped ignite a movement to end the punishment of survivors.

Yasmin and her work have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, National Public Radio, PBS NewsHour, ABC News, NBC News, and more. She currently serves on the U.S. National Advisory Committee for the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth, is a founding co-chair of World Without Exploitation—a national coalition of over 200 anti-trafficking organizations working to end human trafficking and sexual exploitation, and serves as adjunct faculty for the National Judicial Institute on Child Sex Trafficking and the National Multi-Disciplinary Institute on Child Sex Trafficking, which she helped design and co-leads with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

**Yasmin:** *I work together with survivor leaders and allies to advance laws and policies that improve the lives of young women and girls—especially survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation at the federal and state levels. This includes developing laws that end the abuse-to-prison pipeline that punishes survivors for their own exploitation and instead, promoting policies that provide survivors with access to healing, safety, and supportive services. I have also worked to train hundreds of judges around the country on how to improve their response towards trafficked youth and promote alternatives to detention.*

*I've worked to pass more than a dozen state and federal laws in the last several years that have provided tens of millions in funding for survivor services and even created new funding streams including the Domestic Trafficking Victims Fund that is financed by perpetrator fines. I've also produced a number of reports, briefs, and fact sheets that provide critical research and data on the sex trade, racial disparities, gender violence, adultification bias, and criminal justice involvement to ensure the lives of survivors—and especially survivors of color—are prioritized in the policy spaces that impact their lives.*

**Nominator:** *Yasmin fights tirelessly and often behind the scenes for survivors to gain access to justice through legislative reforms. She is passionate, dedicated to this work, and always goes the extra mile to ensure survivors are treated equitably. She was instrumental in supporting the passage of Sara's Law in Illinois in 2023 and worked alongside World Without Exploitation and other advocacy-based organizations to get the Survivor Model (formerly known as the Equality Model) passed in Maine.*





# LLOYD SEALY AWARD

## LAW ENFORCEMENT OF THE YEAR

This is for individuals who have shown excellent judgment and go above and beyond for victims within our community. Their commitment to protection and safety is demonstrated by their efforts to show respect, integrity, and support to every survivor, in all stages of recovery.

Lloyd Sealy was the first African-American officer to graduate from the FBI Academy and make rank as Commander within the NYPD.



## DETECTIVE CHRIS GOEHRING

Kent County Sheriff's Office

Chris Goehring is a Detective with the Kent County Sheriff's Office Human Trafficking Task Force and a Task Force Officer with the FBI's West Michigan-based Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force (WEBCHEX). In these roles, Detective Goehring is dedicated to investigating crimes against children and human trafficking, addressing cases at both the state and federal levels. With a commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals, Detective Goehring brings expertise, diligence, and a deep sense of purpose to combating these critical issues and bringing awareness of trafficking to our communities.

**Nominator:** *Chris was instrumental in the development of the Kent County Sheriff's Office Human Trafficking Task Force. Chris works tirelessly to not only identify, but also to provide resources to victims of human trafficking any time, day or night. Chris has a grasp on the complexities of human trafficking investigations and has successfully prosecuted several cases locally and on the federal level resulting in decades of prison time for traffickers throughout our community.*

*Chris is known by all law enforcement partners in our area (local, state, and federal) and is often brought in as a resource to not only help guide the investigation, but also to help law enforcement understand what it means to build cases without creating additional trauma towards victims. Often, Chris's cases involve no victim testimony or involvement past the initial interviews. Chris has dedicated the last few years to this mission and has brought justice to victims from all walks of life, adults and juveniles.*

*There are few paths to recognize those who have taken on the mission of fighting human trafficking. It is complex and, as you know, often misunderstood. Chris has dedicated his professional path to fighting human trafficking.*

*Chris recently received the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Directors Award for his work on a juvenile human trafficking case in which the suspect was convicted of several federal trafficking charges and will serve decades in prison. This was an extremely rare conviction in West Michigan and is a significant accomplishment to raise awareness of trafficking in our community.*



# LLOYD SEALY AWARD LAW ENFORCEMENT OF THE YEAR

## NOMINEE



### UNDERSHERIFF RYAN HERING

Chippewa County Sheriff's Office

Undersheriff Ryan Hering has served 14 years with the Chippewa County Sheriff's Office, with the first 3 years being assigned to the Correctional Facility. Following that, he was assigned to the Road Division for four years. He currently serves as a Task Force Officer (TFO) with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) within the Sault Sainte Marie Area of Responsibility (AOR).

Undersheriff Hering previously served as a Detective and a Task Force Officer (TFO) with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) within the Tri-County Drug Enforcement Task Force (TRI-DENT) for 7 years and led the task force for 4 years. This task force is responsible for investigating and interdicting drug trafficking and human trafficking offenses in the Eastern Upper Peninsula. Undersheriff Hering joined the Upper Peninsula Human Trafficking Task Force (UPHTTF) as a board member in 2022.

Undersheriff Hering was recently awarded the FBI Directors award in September 2024.

Undersheriff Hering graduated Cum Laude at Lake Superior State University (LSSU) with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice. He completed the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards (MCOLES) academy in 2011. Undersheriff Hering lives just outside of Sault Ste. Marie with his wife and three sons.

**Ryan:** *I was assigned to Tri-County Drug Enforcement Task Force (TRI-DENT) for over 7 years. During that time, I was trained and took part in multiple Genesee Human Oppression Strike Team (GHOST) operations around the state of Michigan. I have combated human trafficking in the Eastern Upper Peninsula by gaining the trust of many survivors. I purchased 20 copies of Leslie King's book When Angels Fight through UPHTTF and distributed them to the county correctional facilities in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I have made contact with survivors in the field and removed them from residences they were being trafficked from. I have helped to have a survivor placed with Sacred Beginnings. I have presented human trafficking awareness to many audiences around the Upper Peninsula with Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney for Chippewa County Kristin Giommi.*

**Nominator:** *Ryan's steadfast and vigilant commitment to fight against human trafficking in his various roles in law enforcement is exceptional! Undersheriff Hering serves on the Board of Directors on the U.P. Human Trafficking Task Force, guest lectures to nursing students at Lake Superior State University, is involved in several demand deterrence undercover operations, and educates fellow law enforcement teams on sex trafficking enforcement and interdiction through NMU Public Safety Institute. Undersheriff Hering doesn't stop there and is totally committed to listening, aiding, and supporting sex trafficking victims. He frequently visits incarcerated women and gives them a copy of Leslie King's book When Angels Fight and has gained the trust of those who have been exploited. What a true and fine example of how law enforcement can help shine the light against human trafficking.*

# LLOYD SEALY AWARD LAW ENFORCEMENT OF THE YEAR

## NOMINEE



### LIEUTENANT WENDY K. REYES

Oakland County Sheriff's Office

Wendy Reyes is a lieutenant with the Oakland County Sheriff's Office. She has been in the law enforcement field for over 37 years. As a law enforcement officer, she worked the road patrol for 7 years and worked in an undercover capacity in Vice/Narcotic Unit. She was then promoted through the ranks to Captain.

During her 8 years as Captain, she was in charge of the investigation unit overseeing all investigations including homicides, rapes, robberies, child crimes, and special investigations. Just prior to the transition to Oakland County Sheriff's Office, she held her final position in Pontiac Police Department, as Chief of Police.

As a Lieutenant with the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, she worked in an investigative capacity and on special projects. She supervises the Auto Theft Unit, Friend of the Court Unit, and Fire Investigation Unit. She worked on the Jurisdictions of Excellence Team in Lansing, creating training modules for law enforcement on "Trauma Informed Response to Sexual Assault" and is on a statewide policy making group for responding to sexual assault.

She most recently was chosen to be the Substation Commander for the Commerce Township jurisdiction. She is training and speaking in Michigan and Oakland County on Human Trafficking. Lt. Reyes has been a member of the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force for 16 years. She works with groups to combat domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. She has had the honor to know and work with individuals who have been victimized by traffickers.

Lt. Reyes has a bachelor's degree in Business Leadership, and in 2014 she graduated from FBI National Academy. In 2016, she went to Nepal, trained law enforcement, prosecutors, and NGOs on understanding trauma and victim-centered investigations.

**Wendy:** *I have been a part of the anti-trafficking movement from before it had name. I worked with the ladies on the street back in the 90s. At the Pontiac Police Department, we prosecuted two serial rapists (of ladies working the streets). The women trusted us; 5 out of 6 victims showed up for court. We put 2 perpetrators away for life. I knew those ladies didn't want to be out there. One of them was my best friend from junior high school, and it was unbelievable to me as a young officer.*

*I have been a part of the anti-trafficking movement for about 17 years. I have been a part of the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force. I worked in safe houses. I trained law enforcement, prosecutors, social workers, medical staff, juvenile workers, and chaplains in trauma and how to act out their trauma education. I have worked with many survivors through police investigations and ministry.*





# WILLIAM STILL AWARD

## ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR

This is for organizations leading the fight against human trafficking and sexual exploitation. This organization is exemplary in their endeavors to collaborate with community stakeholders in an effort to combat this crime against human rights, as well as assist and support survivors of trafficking and exploitation.

William Still was an African-American abolitionist and conductor of the Underground Railroad. He was chairman of the Vigilance Committee, Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, and helped establish the first YMCA for African Americans.

## **THE HOPE PROJECT**

Represented by:  
Carethea Caviness, Advocate & Recovery Coach



Based in Muskegon, The Hope Project provides case management, individual therapy, group therapy, recovery groups, equine therapy, music therapy, advocacy, mentoring, transportation, hygiene products, a place to shower and do laundry, referrals, and extra support services in West Michigan for victims and survivors of sex trafficking of all ages. In efforts to prevent sex trafficking, The Hope Project also provides services for young ladies, 11 to 25 years old, who have experienced significant life challenges that have made them more vulnerable to sex trafficking.

The program uses a holistic, trauma-informed approach to provide options for healing by addressing the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of restoration. The Hope Project strives to remain flexible in order to meet the diverse needs of this population.

In 2024, The Hope Project expanded into Newaygo County where they have a satellite office. The Hope Project continues to educate frontline workers, youth, parents, churches, and other community stakeholders on human trafficking in hopes to prevent, respond, and support victims and survivors.

Seven years ago, Carethea “Rita” Caviness found her home at The Hope Project, an organization founded in 2006 as a nonprofit, faith-based agency committed to ending the suffering of sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and girls. Rita stands at a beacon of hope illuminating the path toward a brighter tomorrow for women and girls across her community and beyond. She is an exceptional advocate and extends her skills as a recovery coach with The Hope Project. Rita presents to students and faculty at schools and manages our satellite office in Newaygo County. She is a resource to all she comes into contact with!

**Rita:** *We want to support the healing of girls and women who have survived the horrific trauma of sex trafficking and prevent further cases through mentoring and education. I am an advocate to many of these women, and our organization provides resources, education, self-care kits, monthly and quarterly groups, individual and group therapy, youth and adult outings, and so much more. We want to bring a light to those in darkness.*



# WILLIAM STILL AWARD ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR

NOMINEE

## WEDGWOOD'S MANASSEH PROJECT

Represented by:

Andrea Keller, Anti-Human Trafficking Coordinator



Wedgwood's Manasseh Project began shortly after professional staff at Wedgwood Christian Services helplessly watched as a child they knew and had cared for was trafficked and exploited in Grand Rapids. Despite all their efforts to find her and offer aid, they were unable and ill-equipped at the time to address her needs and trauma.

To address this growing trend in West Michigan, Wedgwood's Manasseh Project was developed in 2012. Wedgwood's Manasseh Project is an outreach ministry of Wedgwood Christian Services dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of young women and men in West Michigan. Through community education and collaboration, we provide support and specialized residential treatment services for victims of sex trafficking.



Wedgwood offers multiple residential programs, including a home for adolescents who have been identified as victims of trafficking. Our residents are provided with trauma-informed therapy, education, and a variety of expressive therapies to begin their road to healing. The Manasseh Project also partners with local organizations to provide trauma-informed therapy to survivors of human trafficking.

Wedgwood's Manasseh Project is known for its innovative, multi-level platform engagement for education and providing awareness through trainings to school staff and districts, colleges and universities, hospitals and professional organizations, law enforcement, social workers, members of the judicial system, churches, community organizations, community members, families, and much more.



# MADAM CJ WALKER AWARD

## BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

This is for businesses who have woven their mission to fight trafficking and support survivors through their business model and practices.

Madam C.J. Walker was an African-American entrepreneur, philanthropist, and social activist. She is also recorded as the first female self-made millionaire in America.





## ADORED BOUTIQUE

Represented by:

Emily Smith, Owner/Operator

In 2015, God spoke a promise to Emily that began with a career change and the opening of a ministry with a storefront, Adored Boutique. The name, “Adored” represents the heart of the Father for His daughters and His desire for all to have an experience of His deep love for them. Today, Adored Boutique has paid 8914 monthly salaries for survivors and people in vulnerable circumstances, who make our products.

In 2018, Emily established Designed To Be Ministries. Focused on helping men and women mature in the intimacy of their relationship with Jesus and calling them higher into the authority Jesus died to give them. In many ways, Adored and Designed To Be intersect, and in 2024, Emily published her first book, *When Jesus Shows Up In Skinny Jeans*, to expand their reach.

Emily believes that a single “yes” to God can ignite a commitment to not just observe God through a lens of religion but to experience Jesus and the Holy Spirit through the lens of an intimate relationship. And, when the Church is operating from that perspective, we can change the world for the glory of the Lord.

Emily is wife to Rolf, mother to Hannah and Rylan, and dog mom to Phoenix and Willow. She lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where Adored Boutique is located. She loves time with her family, homemade chocolate chip cookies, and taking a good hike on a sunny day.

**Emily:** *A portion of the products we sell at Adored are made by survivors of human trafficking in Grand Rapids and around the world. All other products are made by people who are vulnerable to labor or sex trafficking. The sustainable employment our brands provide breaks the cycle of poverty and exploitation in their employees, families, and communities. When we have a profit to share, we contribute to a Kent County based organization doing boots on the ground work in the fight against human trafficking. Adored has also started its own product line, SOJO, directly employing survivors in both Grand Rapids and Sri Lanka.*

## CYBER DIVE

Represented by:

Zachary Brooks, Director of Strategy



Cyber Dive is dedicated to creating safer digital environments through innovative technology solutions. Known for the Aqua One smartphone, which offers parents real-time insights into their children's online activities, Cyber Dive now brings its expertise to the recovery space with Aqua X. It supports individuals in building safe, empowered digital relationships as they progress toward independence.

**Zachary:** *Cyber Dive aims to make human life better, plain and simple. Instead of going around and simply doing PowerPoint presentations on trafficking, we've dug in with organizations around the country to make formidable change. We've built a platform for residents in safe house programs that builds a safe, responsible relationship to technology. We use technology to leverage life skills like budgeting, job searching, and healing!*

**Excerpt from November 18, 2024 press release (<https://shorturl.at/B0Dre>):** *Cyber Dive, an innovator in digital safety technology, is proud to unveil Aqua X, a groundbreaking platform developed in collaboration with the Phoenix Dream Center, a leading human trafficking recovery program. Aqua X supports individuals in human trafficking recovery programs by providing residents with custom-built smartphones connected to a robust portal. It streamlines care for case managers, enhances managers, reduces recidivism, and lays the foundation for a successful transition.*

*Through extensive time spent with case managers, care teams, and survivors, Cyber Dive gained a deep understanding of the organization's pain points, including high recidivism rates associated with unrestricted phone access post-recovery and the daily operation frictions faced by care teams.*

*Cyber Dive then set out to develop an innovative solution that promotes both access and accountability, guiding individuals safely through each phase of recovery while addressing Phoenix Dream Center's core needs.*

*Cyber Dive expanded this collaborative approach by partnering with recovery leaders, including Safe House Project, Generate Hope, Zoe Ministries, and others. These partnerships helped shape Aqua X, incorporating industry best practices and ensuring the platform meets the diverse needs of recovery programs nationwide.*

*Aqua X introduces a controlled, evolving digital environment that adapts as individuals progress through their recovery. Early in their journey, residents can engage in activities like journaling, listening to music, and connecting with approved contacts, allowing for safe self-expression and emotional growth. As individuals progress, Aqua X unlocks professional and personal development resources, including job tools, skill-building apps, and educational content, empowering residents to build independent lives and reduce relapse risk. Aqua X provides a solution that resonates with recovery facilities by fostering safe digital engagement. This is especially important for organizations like Zoe Ministries, where managing secure access for trafficked youth requires a thoughtful, phased approach.*



## NUVITA GLOBAL

Represented by:

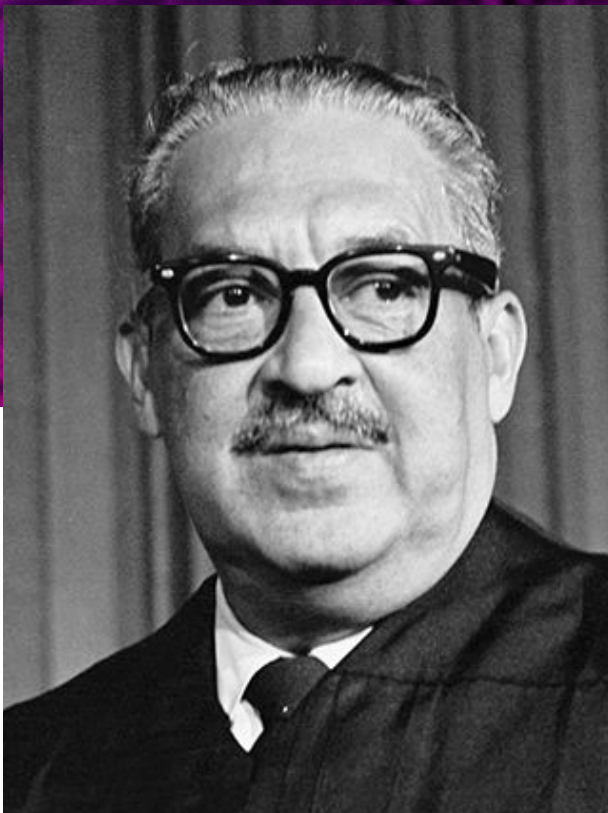
Amanda Fata, Founder/CEO



Nuvita Global is a woman-owned company that develops and manufactures health and wellness products. Nuvita Global is driven by core values such as family, community, independence, and faith, and focuses on combating human trafficking by donating sales proceeds to charitable organizations serving vulnerable women and children.

**Amanda:** *My personal experience working unknowingly within an organization connected to the pornography/trafficking industry ignited a passion to combat this exploitation. As a female founder of this woman-owned business, I've channeled this experience into a mission-driven enterprise dedicated to transforming women's lives and supporting survivors of human trafficking.*

*From day one, a portion of all proceeds has been dedicated to this cause, and we currently donate \$3500 monthly to various organizations and shelters that support women, children, and survivors of human trafficking. Our goal is to one day donate \$10,000 per month to the organizations we partner with. We are proud to have contributed over \$200,000 to 501(c)(3) nonprofits and remain steadfast in our commitment.*



# THURGOOD MARSHALL AWARD

ELECTED OFFICIAL OF THE YEAR

This is for elected officials who govern with a victim-centered approach and give a voice to those who often fall through the cracks.

Thurgood Marshall was an American civil rights lawyer and became the Supreme Court's first African-American justice. He was also a prominent figure in the movement to end racial segregation in our school system.





**JUDGE J. JOSEPH ROSSI**

Kent County 17th Circuit Court

Judge Rossi was elected in November of 2016 and began judicial service on January 1, 2017. Joe serves in the Circuit Court's Civil-Criminal division. He founded and currently presides over Kent County's Treatment and Support Court, which focuses on keeping individuals struggling with serious mental illness "in treatment...and out of jail." He serves as a Governor of the American Judges Association and on the Executive Board of the Michigan Judges Association.

Joe attended the University of Notre Dame where he obtained a degree in English in 1988 and a Juris Doctorate in 1995. Between his undergraduate studies and law school, Joe served in the U.S. Marine Corps, including combat service in Operation Desert Storm and as a Special Operations instructor. Joe remained in the Reserves, and his final tour was on the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, where he worked under the Director of Global Special Operations and Counter-terrorism. Joe retired from military service in 2012 at the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Joe has been married to Marie for 36 years and they have 10 children and 2 grandchildren. He and his family attend St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Grand Rapids. Joe's community service includes President of Kent County Families Against Narcotics (FAN), Board member of Alternative Directions, Board member of Michigan Restorative Justice Committee, and member of the Marine Corps League.

**Judge Rossi:** *I have learned that preventing trafficking requires community support to address victims' trauma and addiction. I founded the Treatment and Support Court (TASC) in Kent County to help individuals charged with felonies access the resources they need to stay "in treatment and out of jail." I now look for signs of trafficking in cases that come before me to identify victims and perpetrators and give maximum prison sentences for traffickers who exploit victims using violence. I also view victims of trafficking with compassion, even if they are coerced to break the law. I support organizations like Sacred Beginnings and their staff, who provide safety and resources for victims of trafficking when they reenter the community.*



# JANE WHITE AWARD

## INDIVIDUAL OF THE YEAR

This is for individuals who are relentless in ensuring victims' voices are heard. They do not settle for the easy answers and question methods that are unfounded by bringing awareness and exposing components and factors that perpetuate human trafficking.

Jane White's passion for caring for those being persecuted, misused, and exploited in the world led her to found the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force, a statewide task force dedicated to the collaboration of community stakeholders to develop and implement trainings, support survivors, and combat trafficking.





**JENNIFER FOPMA**

Clinical Director at Ellie Mental Health

Jennifer Fopma, LMSW, is a passionate, solution-focused clinician with a unique blend of authenticity, humor, empathy, and experience. Jennifer received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Michigan and is a fully licensed clinical social worker with over 30 years in the field!

Just a few of her specialties include work with human trafficking and domestic violence victims, those dealing with chronic medical conditions such as kidney failure, working with adolescents and adults post psychiatric hospitalization, adoption, ASD, and, as a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional, anyone seeking trauma-informed care.

Jennifer has volunteered countless hours in anti-trafficking work and has dedicated decades to educating providers as well as the community on facts vs. myths and how to best serve those who have been trafficked. She was one of the founding members of the Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force (MHTTF) in 2006, and currently serves as the chair of the board of directors. She was a founding member of the At The Crossroads chapter, and is a member of the MDHHS Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking Advisory Committee. Jennifer has received the Unsung Hero Award for her volunteer work in the field in 2018.

Jennifer is currently the Clinical Director of Ellie Mental Health in East Lansing, MI. Ellie has been instrumental in helping to transform the culture of mental health care by providing creative solutions that make wellness accessible in the community and working to eliminate stigma. In this role, she has been able to use her expertise in policy and administration, as well as her skills in training, public relations, and social media to advance outreach and promote the organization's culture of empowerment and inclusivity.



**ANDY SOPER**

Director of Programs and Operations at Grace's Table

Andy Soper works to carve out safe spaces for our most vulnerable neighbors. He founded the advocacy program, the Manasseh Project and opened Michigan's first shelter for minor Human Trafficking victims (2012) and co-founded Grand Rapids HQ, a drop-in center for youth experiencing homelessness (2014). Andy continues to work at the state level to improve training, treatment, and response protocols.

Andy's involvement in the fight against human trafficking includes the following:

- Founded the Manasseh Project (anti-trafficking education, victim advocacy, and shelter)
- Launched HQ (now AYA), a drop-in center for youth experiencing homelessness
- Training for professionals and communities
- MDHHS Human Trafficking of Children Protocol Revision Committee





# HARRIET TUBMAN AWARD

## SURVIVOR OF THE YEAR

This is for individuals with lived experience who dedicate themselves to fighting human trafficking and supporting survivors. This individual has first-hand knowledge about the darkness yet remains a beacon of light, an answer to silent cries, and a responder to the outpouring of despair by trafficked individuals.

Harriet Tubman was an American Abolitionist and social activist who helped facilitate rescues through the Underground Railroad.



### LARA KELLY

Founder of Survivor Source

I am me. My story will show what I have been through, but not who I am. I am a survivor of sex trafficking, having been forced into the life through survival sex at the age of 12. Homeless and vulnerable, I quickly fell into the hands of exploiters, enduring a decade of abuse and objectification. My world was one of mistrust and servitude, where my body was seen as a commodity. Escaping this life was a daunting task, and I faced it alone, without support or guidance. It

took years to find the resources and mental health services that would eventually change my life. Through EMDR therapy, I began to understand my trauma and learn more about myself. This journey of healing and self-discovery helped me realize that I am not an object or something that can be bought. I am me, and that has been the most empowering realization I want to share.

As a survivor of sex trafficking, my journey has been one of resilience and transformation. Recognizing the gaps and needs for support, I was inspired to create Survivor Source, an organization dedicated to providing essential resources for survivors of trafficking. Survivor Source offers a comprehensive listing of resources, including partnerships for online content removal, credit repair, address confidentiality programs, tattoo cover-ups, peer support, and professional development.

In addition to founding Survivor Source, I actively conduct trauma-informed training for other companies, sharing my story to spread awareness and enhance their understanding of trauma. My dedication to this cause has driven me to develop strong leadership skills, making me a valuable asset as a survivor leader and a peer mentor for other survivors. My efforts have empowered many to reclaim their lives and navigate their healing journeys with confidence and support.

Today, I am a single mother of two wonderful children. I am a warrior, a survivor, and a strong, independent woman who loves anime, coffee, and tattoos. I find joy in my children, writing, and learning about history and sociology. I am dedicated to helping others and making a difference in the world.

**Nominator 1:** *This woman is a true survivor leader. She shares her story to bring hope to other survivors and educate the public. She was trafficked for a decade of her life, but now focuses all of her attention to helping other survivors. Not only did she go out of her way to help me find resources, she made sure my basic needs were met, and provided me with help creating my resume and teaching me about financial trauma before I started my job search. I've seen her speak to so many groups making a difference.*

**Nominator 2:** *Lara has shown tireless efforts in developing a platform that aides survivors in rediscovering self-love and happiness and is making a significant impact. Lara's dedication to creating a safety net for survivors of human sex trafficking is truly commendable. By funding tattoo cover-ups, online content removals, and other healing services, Lara is providing invaluable support to those in need and helping them reconnect with the world. She is truly an inspiration to those around her and is making a huge difference one person at a time.*





### BRIGETTE ROBARGE

Survivor Representative, Michigan Human Trafficking Health Advisory Board

I am a lived experience expert of online sexual exploitation and have 19 years of personal and professional experience combating human trafficking. I am a current board member for the State of Michigan as a representative for survivors. I've trained over 10,000 professionals, students, and community members on how to identify victims of trafficking. I advocated for the \$5 million state budget for victims services, with success. I made it my mission that licensed professionals

are required to take human trafficking training as part of licensing renewal, with success. My advocacy (story) led to federal policy that survivors of human trafficking are deemed homeless under HUD and eligible for housing assistance. Most importantly, mentoring and assisting survivors over the years has been very rewarding. The best way to introduce myself is from the hearts of my community:

**Lisa:** *Brigitte Robarge is a strong woman who found herself in a vulnerable situation. Life isn't always easy. Unfortunately, her faith in mankind led her to trust a manipulative and dangerous man who took advantage of her vulnerabilities and took her down a violent and abusive path that resulted in horrific trauma. Brigitte hasn't allowed herself to stay there! She is no victim. She is a fighter. She didn't like how her life was, and she chose to work hard to face the abuses and the traumas that she had endured. She worked hard to heal and leave her past where it belonged. She knew that her soul and heart were good and pure. And she understands that those who are vulnerable in society need someone to advocate and fight for them. And that's where Brigitte truly shines. She is a fighter for those who don't have the strength to fight for themselves. She doesn't shy away from difficulties or conflict. She faces it head-on and takes it to those who have the power to make changes. She is a survivor of human trafficking and works hard to educate those who can and should make a difference. She continuously fights to end this inhumane horror.*

**Amber:** *Brigitte Robarge is an exceptionally strong Woman, Mother, and Survivor of Human Trafficking. I saw her rise out of the ashes and blossom into an Advocate, Speaker, Social Worker, and Board Member. She has proven that there is nothing that this life can throw at her that she will not obliterate and overcome. She's an asset to everyone she encounters. I'm just glad I get to call her my sister.*

**Jade:** *Brigitte Robarge is one hell of a woman; she comes from a hard life but persevered through it all. She is compassionate, she'll give you the shirt off her back, she's smart, she's raised three beautiful children and is one of the best moms I know. Brigitte gives it to you straight-forward, she always will, whether you like it or not. Once you have her friendship, it is something worth keeping forever.*

**Jeni:** *Brigitte Robarge is my sister from another mother, and my best friend. She is kind and will give the shirt off her back to anyone in need. She has a no-holds-barred approach when working with survivors and gives credit where credit is due. She simply is amazing! Compassionate, she truly puts herself in your shoes. Resourceful, resilient, personable, and the best mother to her three kids. I applaud how far she's come, excited for where she's going, and she's a true empath and teacher, while remaining teachable. A lion's roar for equal and fair justice for survivors. I look up to her so much and cannot fathom living this life without Brigitte by my side.*



## MICKEILA L. TATE

I am a former foster youth. I was born into a family who is into organized crime, which includes human trafficking. I was clueless about this and was living a normal, peaceful, and happy life. Unfortunately, I became a target because of a large inheritance that my criminal family wanted for themselves. This targeting started off with many threats and physical attacks after the theft of my identity and my kids' identities in order to take my inheritance by force.

I found out that human trafficking is generational in my bloodline and it involves many people in high places that were willing to commit more crimes to cover things or to keep me quiet. I am determined to break this generational curse. My children and I were trafficked by my family who wanted to be a part of my children's and my inheritance. They decided to sell me and my babies off to corrupt individuals who are illegally committing modern day slavery and who have been trafficking my family for money. This escalated quickly because I was now aware of what was happening and I was forced to stay quiet through threats, being kidnapped, multiple attempted murders, stalking, tracking devices being placed on my cars, and phones tapped, but I survived by the grace of God.

This network would continue to pursue power over me and my kids through threats and intimidation. I was told by the traffickers that I don't own myself, that they own me and my children. They have tried to keep me hidden and in isolation, but I rebelled against this criminal organization. I was determined not to be bullied and exploited in this manner. This human trafficking involved people that are supposed to keep us safe, and it was terrifying to be a witness of this. My family, friends, my own mother, aunts, and uncles, etc. willingly gave me and my kids up to keep themselves from being trafficked.

On June 24, 2022, I was coerced to Ohio from my home in Ypsilanti, Michigan by my mother, sister, and sister's husband. My sister and her husband were hired as handlers to take my life once they got us to Ohio. God spared me and allowed me to see what was happening. There is so much more to this story. Many people in my family died at the hands of these horrible people, but my children and I survived. I am determined to share my story and be a light to others who are going through this. I know God got me through it so I can help others recognize the signs and learn to speak up. My fight consisted of being brave and resilient.

I have an associates degree in Arts. I am a national recording artist; my artist name is MZ.KEILA on all music platforms. I am a cosmetologist and a digital creator with approximately 40,000+ followers. I love to dance, cook, write, and I love fun outings and nature walks. I am a tax preparer, and I am also in the home health care field. I am a survivor and a generational curse breaker. I am a woman of God. I love Jesus. I am a prayer warrior, I have a good heart. I am a mother of 10. I am a survivor of many storms by the grace of God. I am currently in the process of admitting back into college to get my degree in criminal justice so that I can help people who have struggled with being targeted by traffickers or domestic violence victims, as well as advocating for children who suffered at the hands of foster care.





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Thank you for your participation!

The winners will be announced at the  
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