



“Make it Zero – Engaging with Impact where He Leads”

“One thing I believe is vital is prayer,” said Mary Frances Bowley, Chief Strategy Officer of Wellspring Living when she opened the discussion at BELIEVES on “Make It Zero – Engaging with impact where He leads” that she led on Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2015.



Bowley, who founded Wellspring Living, an organization fighting childhood sexual abuse and exploitation in 2001, said that before Wellspring was founded, there was first a foundation of prayer established.

“Back in 2000, when others and I first began to sense a prompting to connect on this issue, we prayed over this city,” said Bowley. “Thanks to Jim Lientz, who was the COO of the State of Georgia at the time, we had the opportunity to meet in a conference room downtown overlooking the city and a group of us prayed every Thursday morning at 7:30 AM over our city of Atlanta.”

In addition to the weekly prayer, Bowley said they had a member of the Billy Graham family come and help coordinate an event at Philips Arena for 20,000 people to pray for the city and those who were sexually abused and exploited.

“One thing we saw from all this was there was a great disparity between those in church with hope, and those without hope.”

All the prayers stayed in the hearts of Bowley and those who she was praying with, and in 2001 Wellspring was launched. Within a few weeks Bowley and the others working with her realized there was a need for a home for women and girls who had been sexually abused or exploited.

“It started with Melissa, who was 16 years old when we encountered her. She had run away with her “boyfriend” who was 29 years old,” stated Bowley. “She shared all sorts of things that I couldn’t believe – I came from a sheltered background but learned.”

Bowley said that if you were to talk with Melissa today, she will tell you it wasn’t Wellspring, but God who changed her life.

As Bowley learned more, and she and the Wellspring team encountered more women and girls needing help, others began to notice even more.

“The first book I wrote, *A League of Dangerous Women*, came from someone seeing what was going on and saying, ‘You need to write this down,’” recalled Bowley. “Now these women are dangerously good for God’s kingdom.”

The work at Wellspring continued for 5+ years. Then there was another turning point.

“In 2007, Mayor Franklin approached me at a prayer breakfast and said, “We need help on trafficking.”

Bowley shared with the audience at BELIEVES that Atlanta is the #1 city in the United States for trafficking people to make money.

“There are a lot of myths -- It’s not our kids. It’s not business men here,” Bowley said. “That’s wrong – these are our kids.”

Most buying of sex tied to trafficking happens in suburbs north of I285, where there is disposable income, said Bowley, a founding member of the Georgia Statewide Human Trafficking Task Force.

“The things these girls have gone through ... if I had gone through it, I don’t know if I could believe there was a God. We have to see these girls as God made them. In recent times, my heart has been wrecked for women and what they’re going through.”

The Wellspring team is working a lot now through YMCAs, specifically Carver YMCA, to give girls all their needs require.

“The truth is, people can get Jesus, but need help with their needs to,” said Bowley, who was awarded the Martin Luther King Community Service Award.



Bowley, who was appointed to the Governor’s Commission on Domestic Violence in 2010, had another turning point in January 2014, when Randstad, the second largest staffing organization in the world decided to reach out and offer to join the Wellspring team in their efforts.

“This all happened because a leader from Randstad called and said, ‘Mary Frances I saw your Ted Talk and think we can help with girls/women getting employed.’”

Shortly after, paid apprenticeships at \$12/hour got set up with Randstad for girls and women in the Wellspring programs. Then in October 2014, with the support for Randstad, Wellspring opened the Empowered Living Academy at Carver YMCA for women from ages 18 to 32 years of age.

“Now these women have hope,” said Bowley.

For Bowley, what wrecks her heart the most about the women they serve is that the women have children.

“Who knows who can change the world from amongst these kids,” she said. “By serving these women, we can change things and change our city.”

Bowley then took a moment to share with those in attendance her favorite Bible verse – Psalm 82 ...

*God presides in the great assembly; he renders judgment among the “gods”:
“How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?
Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.
“The ‘gods’ know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
“I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’
But you will die like mere mortals; you will fall like every other ruler.”
Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.*

Pivoting from sharing the psalm, Bowley said traffickers use things for good – such as telling girls “you’re beautiful,” “I want to take care of you,” or “I want to be your daddy” – and turn them to evil.

“I think that is the most wicked thing,” exclaimed Bowley.

Bowley went on to say, “As God made each person, He’ll do anything for His children. He’ll use us to make that happen. God never meant for any of this to happen. He wants all to know Him. We can’t do it if we’re not praying for our children, praying for transformation.”

“If we look at trafficking and just rescue girls we will never change anything. We have to look at where all this starts from – REPENTANCE.”

In January, Bowley and Wellspring will have another book coming out called *Make it Zero* containing stories of all sorts of people overcoming all sorts of things like homelessness, isolation, abuse, and more.

“God wants no one to perish,” stated Bowley. “There will be one million kids this year alone who will be reported abused – including 100,000 to 300,000 domestic kids who will be trafficked.”

At the end of each section in *Make it Zero*, there are steps on how anyone can take action, as well as understand to share awareness with others.

“One example in the book is about Jacob, a child who becomes aware of poverty,” said Bowley. “Through an online simulation, Jacob gets a job, then he budgets for taxes and other things. By day 12 he is out of money. He learns experientially that ‘I live in Buckhead but this isn’t the same for everyone.’”

In *Make it Zero* the last chapter is called One Hope. There is a thread of God throughout the book.

“Prayer is our only hope. To me other than becoming informed, what we can do is pray for the girls and others in need,” said Bowley.

Putting prayer into action, Bowley closed her remarks and invited everyone to spend the rest of the time together praying. And they did.

Bowley and all those in attendance took a few minutes on each of the following topics praying together and aloud:

- His purpose for every child is a plan for hope.
- For children who are at risk to have an encounter with someone so they won't be vulnerable.
- For a way that people can see how to become tangibly involved and be protectors for those at risk.
- For those who have broken hearts that they'd find peace, healing, and wholeness.
- For those in law enforcement and the judicial system to have eyes opened to see what's happening because it's tricky.
- For those who are actually trafficking the children.



Everyone in attendance was thankful for the opportunity to unite in prayer. Then Bowley invited questions.

Father Jose Kochuparampil, a priest at the Cathedral of Christ the King, asked, "You mentioned about poverty's connection to trafficking, can you explain more?"

Bowley responded, "A lot of times girls are in a home where needs are not met, and they meet this man who says he'll take care of them. One of our girls was living in Johns Creek and was hungry. Her dad was on drugs. One day she went to McDonald's and a trafficker saw she was hungry and by herself. He offered her a Happy Meal, and that's where the relationship started for her being trafficked. It only takes a minute. It is overwhelming. My hope is that something in this time brings hope and is inspiring."

Justin Ryan, Moving Consultant at Alantic Relocation Services, followed by asking, "What are some things we can be aware of and see?"

"If you see ...

- a teenage girl who is with a man that's older and doesn't look like they are kin or family,
- a girl that is homeless,
- a girl with lots of tattoos (because often they are branded), or
- a girl that shouldn't have means for fancy purses, or things they don't appear to be able to afford,

... then they're probably being groomed. In any of these scenarios, call the police," said Bowley.



Knowing that all that was discussed during the BELIEVES session can be overwhelming, Bowley said she wanted to close with a story of hope.

“One of our girls is in the Carver YMCA area. She would drive 90 miles each day to take part in the Empowered Living program. Through the program, she got an apprenticeship with Randstad. Her note is in the card that each of you has in front of you...”

